WIT, HUMOR, AND SHAKSPEARE.

Twelve Essays.

By JOHN WEISS.

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WIT, HUMOR, AND SHAKSPEARE.

In Press:

The West-Easterly Divan of Goethe.

Translated, with an Introduction and Notes,

By John Weiss.

[Ready in December.]

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THE CAUSE OF LAUGHTER.

THIS subject is best reached from the point of reflecting that, of all the animals, man alone appears to be capable of laughter. If, as so many naturalists now claim, man has ascended by successive evolutions of varieties from a lower animal type, we ought to be able to find some germs of the laughing propensity among our ancestors. The first witness we summon on this question is the anatomist, because the physical expression that accompanies an act of laughter depends upon the connection of the respiratory nerves with the diaphragm below and the orbicular and straight muscles of the mouth above. But these muscles are not perfectly developed in the animals. When dogs are fondly gambolling about you, there is "a slight eversion of the lips," which is a rudimentary hint of man's facial expression in an act of mirth. The dog has been the associate of human moods in all countries, and for thousands of years; yet, although we are told that "the little dog laughed to see the sport," he has not yet made up his mouth for any thing more emphatic than a simper.

Some kinds of monkeys have established a facial expression, accompanied with a laughing noise, which is

so like the human that we might charge them with being entertained at the practical jokes which they pass upon each other, or over some obscurer sense of sylvan incongruity. We can see, at least, that Nature was preparing in them the nervous connections which men employ to transmit their pleasurable emotions; as the flexible plants which dangle by the streams and chasms of the Andes are woven by his afterthought to span the intervals, and the good cheer of humanity passes to and fro.

The respiratory nerves radiate from their centre in the medulla oblongata, the place to which the brain must transmit the first shock of the surprise which ends in smiling and laughing. Thence it is transmitted to the heart and diaphragm, quickening the action of the one, and setting the other in motion, at the same instant climbing to engage the facial nerves in sympathy; then the orbicular muscles retract, forcing the cheek up towards the eye, and tightening the muscles which surround the eyelid.

All our passions appear to claim the respiratory nerves for outward expression. They are a signal corps which communicate by hoisting the blush, the smile; by letting fall the tear, by the exhalation of a sigh, by the explosions of laughter. The life-breaths of joy and grief tend primitively to the lungs, and they voice the mother-tongue of all emotions.

I have often wondered how animals can avoid being struck with the differences which exist among themselves, so much more salient and intrusive than among

he races of men, in shape, gestures, tones, and habits. What a wide range of Nature's curious freakery a forest has, or a district of country like those plains and thickets of Africa, where the natives dig their great pit and organize a monster drive! Into it falls every thing which cannot escape to either side. The giraffe, elephant, gnu, antelope, hartbeest, zebra, jackal, — think of the commingling of strange discrepancies thus suddenly collected! Were it not for the panic which prevails, and the accidents to life and limb, one would suppose that they ought to be aware of Nature's whims in themselves, and to narrowly escape inventing amusement. But curiosity and aversion probably exhaust the speculative possibilities of animals in this direction.

It is true, we occasionally hear of happy families, like that of the prairie-dog who has an owl and a rattlesnake to share his housekeeping, which they do with zest; for they have established a taste for the young of the prairie-dog, and they hire his tenement only with an eye to business.

When a great freshet takes possession of a country, and evicts the tenants of every hole, thicket, and burrow, there is an indiscriminate stampede of the animals for the driest and safest places: hares, rattlesnakes, mice, cats, and the carnivora cling together to the tops of trees, or wait in terror on the highest hills. So a prairie fire startles all the wild creatures with its sweep into a promiscuous race towards some spot that cannot be tenanted by flame. There they might observe the strange traits which shun each other in ordinary times

or seek each other only when hunger demands its toll. While the fright and the dread of death are beginning to pass off are these creatures insensibly attracted to notice each other? Probably only as a curious deer observes a man. The danger has not established any sympathy between them. And they separate without any better opinion of each other, nor approach to geniality. Even men who are strangers, and in general dissociated by the distinctions of society, will be thrown together by some stress of the moment, part with a mutual feeling of relief, and resume their predilections. Yet man only is endowed with the magnanimity to welcome the emergencies which abolish superficial differences. They can be invaded by a circumstance which comprises them under an idea different from those which keep them asunder; and this new congruity can make the forced society congenial. It is Nature's witty rendering of the text that declares all men of one blood. The effect is grave, and under some conditions it may reach an heroic stature, but the root of wit is the nourisher; and only those creatures who are capable of annihilating capricious distinctions by a feeling of common humanness are capable of enjoying the union of heterogeneous ideas.

What mutual impression do a dog and a duck make? He runs around with frolic transpiring in his tail, and barks to announce a wish to fraternize; or perhaps it is a short and nervous bark, and indicates unsettled views about ducks. Meantime, the duck waddles off with an inane quack, so remote from a bark that it must con-

ince any well-informed dog of the hopelessness of pro-osing either business or pleasure to such a doting and oothless pate. He certainly must have overheard the onversation of his betters, when the Shallows, Slenders, nd Silences are near. What a prompt retreat human eings make, and what wariness is expended in steering lear of them for the future! Yet I never feel quite ure that the dunces are not amused at the manœuvre. s there a human being permitted to live without wit nough to know when he is avoided? Even this duck as a twinkle in that bead of an eye, as it rejoins the ther ducks, that seems to convey to us its sense of the bsurdness of a creature so caninely exuberant. Or vas it a duck which I noticed? I am sure I have often een creatures who are hopelessly posed or scandalized vaddle away from some superior extravagance.

What vague auroral flittings of human perception oass beneath that horrid crest of the gorilla, as he ele-vates it in astonishment at encountering a creature of natchless symmetry like the wild ass, of picturesque-ness like the zebra, of remote rarity like a beautiful woman! As for cockatoos, parrots, and macaws, I am convinced they are an endless source of amusement to he monkey tribe, who pelt them with nuts to make hem scream and scold. Monkeys have a great flow of animal spirits: this, with their imitative talent and quick observation, renders them capable of entertaining ludi-crous impressions. But one must be very closely related to the anthropoid ape, if not quite recently derived from it, to tell what they are.

There are many well-attested cases of an absolute enjoyment among animals that sometimes rises to the pitch of mirthfulness. One day, Dr. Kane came across a long, icy, inclined shoot, like the artificial coasting-places made by the Russians, down which a long file of white bears went sliding on their hams: at the bottom they jumped up like a crowd of boys, with evident delight, to carry their sleds back to the top of the hill. He says that the signs of pleasure among them were unmistakable.

The Canadian fish-otter (*Lutra Canadensis*) loves to do the same thing. He climbs to the top of a snow-ridge in winter, or of a slippery bank in summer, lies on his belly, with the fore feet bent backward, then, pushing with the hind legs, down he goes. So the Russians, with their ice-slides, are only imitating the sport of their own arctic creatures. I suppose that long ago the pleasure derived from an involuntary and accidental slide originated the habit.

Lieutenant Dall says that the beavers in Alaska engage in gymnastics for fun. If they find a smooth, miry bank, they betake themselves to sliding down it. And the Californian gray whale loves to play in the shoals where the surf breaks; keeping a wary outlook, so that it continually escapes being beached. Its pleasure is enhanced by the peril. Seals do the same thing when they find a heavy surf. They turn from side to side with half-extended fins, moved apparently by the heavy ground-swell; at times making a playful spring with bended flukes that throws the body clear out of the

ater, to come down with a heavy splash: then, giving vo or three spouts, they settle again under water, to ppear perhaps the next moment rolling over in a list-ss manner with the heavy swell, plainly full of intense njoyment.

If the sea-otter of Siberia escapes into the water from s hunters, it expresses joy and derision by marked ges-ures, one of which is the putting a paw up over the yes, as if shading them to regard the hunters. It ould seem to be a very slight natural variation when ne thumb slips to the point of the nose, and the rest of ne paw executes that vibratory sarcastic gesture highly pproved by boys.

The same sea-otter will mourn itself to a skeleton ver the loss of its young. If animals can be capable f grief, as innumerable facts testify, mirth ought to ndow them with a finite compensation.

Lady Barker, in her book called "Station Life in New ealand," describes a favorite cockatoo, whose amuse-ent consisted in imitating a hawk. "He reserves this ne piece of acting until his mistress is feeding the oultry; then, when all the hens and chickens, turkeys nd pigeons are in the quiet enjoyment of their break-st or supper, the peculiar shrill cry of a hawk is heard verhead, and the bird is seen circling in the air, utter-ng a scream occasionally. The fowls never find out hat it is a hoax, but run to shelter, cackling in the reatest alarm; hens clucking loudly for their chicks, urkeys crouching under the bushes, the pigeons taking efuge in their house. As soon as the ground is quite

clear, the bird changes his wild note for peals of laughter from a high tree, and finally, alighting on the top of a hen-coop filled with trembling chickens, remarks, in a suffocated voice, 'You'll be the death of me.'"

If we are disposed to think that such accounts of originality are only cases of accidental coincidence, what shall we say to the following story, which comes to us from an authority upon which we may rely: —

A long-tailed paroquet, which had been a pet of an English barrack in India, where it had picked up all kinds of oaths and slang, passed into the possession of a lady in England, who, one day, receiving a visitor endowed with a very decided squint, took her into the room where the bird was kept. No sooner did the bird see this lady than it cried, "Twig her eye! What a beauty!"

How many human beings get immortality discounted for themselves upon a capital of sprightliness hardly more extensive than this parrot's!

There is also a well-authenticated story of a parrot belonging to an English carpenter, who undertook to make it say a long word in several syllables, that had no particular meaning. All at once the parrot declined to use any of his usual phrases, and remained entirely mute for a year, at the end of which time he suddenly pronounced the word, and then talked as before. The story is parallel to the Roman one, of the parrot which heard for the first time the note of a trumpet, became silent for several months, and then suddenly began to imitate the note. It is remarkable that no rehearsals or prelu-

ons of the difficulty to be overcome were ever heard in ther case.

The naturalist has lately found a monkey of the Gibon family, which has a voice that is divided into distinct otes that correspond to our scale and run an octave or ore, clear, musical, and firm. What an invaluable rize this would be for M. Offenbach and his opera ouffe! for the creature has all the flexibility and briskess, all the parody of human nature, and all the lubricy which this style of art requires, with the caudal mphasis appended; and great economy would be ained in exempting more expensive human performers om moral degradation. We would all pay our money r such an exhibition, rejoiced to see the drama recoving from its decay.

But, as yet, no cosey couples of clever apes have been scovered in paroxysms of laughter over the last sylvan quivoque; nor have elephants been seen silently shakg at a joke too ponderous for their trunks to carry. verybody has observed how ducks will gather into a rner of the farm-yard and stand still, and apparently eathless, as if listening to a jocose tale fished out of eir Decameron of a gutter, then break into hearty acking, which reminds one of the wheezing of snips fellows over their muddy jest. But probably the ucks are only holding a caucus on the question of food, nominate the next pool to be dredged, and make it nanimous.

But when we consider that the higher animals can mpare objects and make selections, exercise a memory

and have association of ideas concerning each other and the outer world, we come near to that human quality which is the ground of the function of laughter. These mental traits are the buried roots of the consciousness which blossoms into smiles in the sun of wit and humor. For the power to combine or to contrast two or more objects, to remember one absent object by another present one, to experience a feeling that two objects are associated, leads to the highest manifestations of wit. In the delicate structures of men and women, which are bequests to them descending through the whole inviolate entail of Nature, refined by it and amplified till they entertain keenly the pathos of life, all mental traits accumulate into the faculty of imagination, upon which every thing that is laughable depends.

With this faculty man makes shift to relieve the moments when existence, with its incessant toil and merciless persistency of routine, threatens to become insupportable. One day is not exactly like another, if hearty laughter loosens its handcuffs and lets the prisoner stretch his frame and have a little run. Every laugh reddens the blood, which goes then more blithely to dissipate the fogs of a moody brain. Multitudes of our American brains are badly drained in consequence of a settling of the wastage of house-grubbing and street-work into moral morasses which generate many a chimera. So there is something positively heroic in the hilarity which braves, light-armed as it is, our brood of viperous cares, and attacks their den. One flash of a smile shears off Medusa's head with impunity.

No creature that is not capable of being bored can be pable of laughing at its own incongruous circumances. The more simply constructed the brain and rvous system are, the less liability is there to that isfortune of *ennui*. We cannot imagine that a turtle's ead gets tired of lying around, decapitated, for a week more; or that a toad imprisoned in a rock or tree for ne or two thousand years should become jaded by its ose confinement. When the miner's pick releases him, s hop is as alert, and his appetite for the next fly as en, as before his prison stole upon him. The lower imals are as contented as the forests and waters in hich they pass an instinctive existence. Continually eerful we may suppose they are, even when the larder empty and the springs run low. Their monotonous und of hungering, feeding, and procreating sympaizes with the reposeful temper in which the whole of e inanimate nature discharges those functions, as we e the flower absorb, fructify, and exhale. But as the ain becomes more complicated, and capable of breedg more positive ideas and feelings, — such as the esting of a greyhound, the tact of setters and retriev, the attachment of dogs for persons, — we may expect observe a liability to suffer tedium. How plainly a od dog can show his disappointment when he goes out th a green sportsman, or with one who is so abstracted his mood that he neglects the chances to shoot! The g's natural language is that he will not tolerate such irreligious abuse of providence: he will soon begin sulk and not put up any more game.

If an animal is capable of having a consecutive dream as Miss Mitford's greyhound was, who regularly every year, just before the coursing season began, used to dream of going out, and quested in his sleep, such an animal can feel the torment of *ennui*. He is not blindly indicating that a season has come around, — as a wound made by the bite of a lion will gape anew in the same month of the following year, and the juice of the grape is agitated in remembrance of its vintage, — but the animal is conscious that the time has come for him to resume his talent.

Such dogs become tired of waiting if their masters are absent, and are disquieted if their day's routine be changed. And you will notice in a zoölogical garden many of the better-educated animals to whom the monotony of their life is a positive sorrow, till, like opium, it stupefies their spirits. They have not the resource of man, who is also devoured with *ennui*, but, furnished with imagination, can dissipate its most tragic moods by heart-shaking and sky-splitting laughter. His most climbing grief is like an Alpine flower that sits close to the snow-line and takes its color; but near at hand are hillsides sprinkled with winking wild-flowers, and the blue succory stands amid the corn. There is but a step from one to the other.

That step is taken, and the gravity of life upset whenever any of our ideas can suddenly and for a moment join an object or another idea, and appear to belong to it, though essentially different in every respect, and only capable of seeming like by the imagination starting a

pretence of it. Things that are incongruous are forced to touch at one point, and for one moment to feign congruity. The surprise to the mind is a laughable one, because it is in the habit of regarding ideas and objects as they naturally cohere or differ. Sanity and business depend upon this habit. The understanding is at home in the ordinary congruities of things, and is not prepared to admit that two things which are absolutely incongruous can be ever made for a single instant to agree. Such a result cannot be soberly contemplated: the order of the world and the mental consistency which pays the butcher for his meat and the milkman for his refreshing dash of the hydrant forbid it. It becomes laughable precisely because this gravity of order is against it. If a thing cannot be done soberly, and yet *is* done, the result is fatal to sobriety. This is the root of every laugh: two things which never met before, and ought not to meet, hail each other and set up a claim of relationship on this very ground, — namely, that it was always impossible that they could be related In the farce of "Box and Cox," says one of these doubles to the other eagerly, "*Have you* the mark of a strawberry between your shoulders?" "No," answers the other. "Oh, then you are indeed my long-lost brother!" It is so in the relations which make laughter. There should be the mark of a strawberry; but just because there is not, the whim of fraternity is raised, and for a moment it appears as if the two things must have been twins at birth, though separated since.

Thus, to begin at the lowest degree of this subject,

the simply ludicrous has its origin in the surprise caused by something which interrupts or modifies an ordinary procedure: the latter is thus joined for a moment to an idea not belonging to it. Why do we laugh when a person tumbles upstairs? or when some respectable female struggles with an umbrella which has shamelessly turned its bare ribs upon her and sails jauntily with her down the street, or flounders in the gutter, an inebriated wreck of usefulness? Because an erect position is the normal one for man, and a protecting umbrella the helpmeet for woman. If it were not so, we should laugh to see the most revered person succeed in controlling her gingham dome, and stemming the tide as easily as the whale which furnished it with bones. There is nothing essentially ludicrous in seeing a man chase an animal: on the contrary, if you are trying to head off your favorite pig and persuade it to taste again your bounty, it is one of the saddest spectacles in existence. But when a man is in full hue and cry after his own hat we laugh, because a hat is inseparable from a head in idea, but becomes separated in fact. A hatter's shop is full of the larvæ of this idea, but they would never hatch there into hats. The conjunction of a head to each is needed to make a perfect notion of a hat.

If we could be sure of preserving our own scalps, we should like to have been near enough to watch the expression of the first Indian who ever killed a man wearing a wig. For the wig is a sudden violation of the logic of scalping, and the astonished Indian would have raised a laugh as he raised the artificial hair.

General Sherman's body-servant was a German who went with him through the war, but could never realize the idea that the war at last was over. One day the General, having travelled from the South to Chicago, was on the point of leaving, and ordered this man to pack a valise. The one he selected was so enormous that the General remonstrated, and examined what could be within. It was filled with hotel towels that had been looted from Atlanta clear through, in company with table-spoons of the Milledgeville Hotel; the German plundering on every route as if we were still marching through Georgia. This incongruous behavior has all the effect of a ludicrous incident.

Whatever accidental infirmity deposits us in positions incongruous with our ordinary state generates a ludicrous impression. When the obese lover, encased in corsets and tightly-strapped pantaloons, fell plump upon his knees before a lady to make his declaration, she was embarrassed, and besought him to arise; but he, fast anchored in the stiffest of costumes, whimpered out, "I can't, madam," and she had to ring for a servant. That is simply ludicrous. But suppose I should say that his suit had been rejected, — it would be an execrable remark, but still would modify the ludicrous impression, and raise it into a higher region of the pleasurable by making the first step of a pun towards the peculiar element of wit.

If a pun is good, the pleasure is sometimes purely mental and scarcely gets beyond a smile; for it constrains two different ideas into an accidental relation

with one word, and the clever feat surprises us. We are not looking for it, as our life is plain-spoken, does not twist its intention nor its language, and passes for what it is. A friend, really wanting to know if Foote the comedian had ever been in Cork, in good faith asked him. "No," said he; "but I have seen a good many drawings of it." So the new conundrum finds us unprepared: "Which goes the quicker, — a full minute or a spare moment?" That pleases the mind, but it does not make us laugh as when Abraham Lincoln, in his attack of small-pox, said, "Now I am willing to see the office-seekers, for at last I have something I can give 'em all." We laugh because the play upon the word "give" betrays and yet relieves the moral annoyance of that class of beggars.

Punning can enhance its quality by lurking in the quotation of well-known and esteemed lines; as when a man who is importuned to subscribe to something, on the score of the virtue there is in giving, should quote the tender George Herbert, —

> "Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
> Like seasoned timber, never gives."

In this way Mr. Thackeray made one of his best puns. Some one was talking to him of a man of talent, who was prodigiously addicted to beer; saying what a pity it was, for they hardly knew his equal. "Yes," said Thackeray, "take him for half-and-half, we ne'er shall look upon his like again."

So Douglas Jerrold, referring in one of his plays to the English habit of scrawling names and lines with

diamonds upon window-panes, makes one of his characters say: "One man goes to foolscap, another to a pane of glass. They may be very different people; but, well considered, I doubt if the motive hasn't the same source." "At least, the same effect," is the reply; "for, as my friend Laman Blanchard sings, —

"'Tis oft the poet's curse
To mar his little light with verse.'"

In the same way a classic line which is quoted in mimicry of a modern situation can raise the surprise of a pun. The very best instance, perhaps, of this felicity was the quotation of Dean Swift when a lady's long train swept down a fine fiddle and broke it. He cried out, —

"Mantua væ miseræ nimium vicina Cremonæ!"*

Sporting with words blew aside a little the powder-smoke of the battle of Shiloh, and etherized the pain of one of our soldiers, whose cheek and chin had been carried away by a shot. "What can we do for you?" asked his comrades. "Boys," said he, with what articulation was left to him, "I should like a drink of water mighty well, if I only had the face to ask for it."

A very good pun can be made unconsciously, as when the schoolmaster asked the class what Shylock meant when he said, "My deeds upon my head." "Well," said one of the boys, "I don't know, unless he carried his papers in his hat." In the same way, Lord Dundreary makes a good pun because he can only comprehend one

* Ninth Eclogue of Virgil, 28th line.

use for one word at a time; and, if the most obvious use strikes him first, he is incapable of making any transfer of it. So he says to Lieutenant Vernon, "Of course you can *pass* your examination: what I want to know is, can you *go through* it?"

Every language invites this trick of the pun. The Greeks and Romans relished it, but the instances would involve explanations too tedious for popular reading. Perhaps a few may be ventured from the French, who are as delicate in this as in the manufacture of a Sêvres cup or a pattern of tapestry.

Henry IV., at the surrender of Chartres, received a deputation at the gates. The spokesman said, "Sire, the city submits to your Majesty as much by divine as by Roman law." He replied, "You may as well add, by canon law, too."

Louis XIV., during a critical aspect of his affairs, said in council, "*Nous maintiendrons la couronne de la France.*" His dauphin merely remarked, "*Maintenons la*" (*Madame de Maintenon l'a*).

When complaint was made in Paris that the first Napoleon was too young to assume command of an Italian campaign against Austria, he said, "They may let me alone: in six months *j'aurai Milan*" (*j'aurai mille ans*).

But the late M. Jules Janin made the cleverest pun. It was at a time when the Parisian authorities were macadamizing some of the streets that he was unsuccessfully proposed for membership of the famous Académie. Some one condoling with him for his failure, he

replied that he meant to throw himself into the streets. "But how so, Monsieur?" "*Parceque, dans ce cas, on tout de suite m'acadamiserait.*"

Punning approaches the character of wit when the identity of sound not only covers two ideas, but also hides an allusion to still another. When Douglass Jerrold by a quick motion accidentally threw himself backward into the water, and was carried into a tavern, he said to the servant, "I suppose these accidents happen frequently off here." "Oh, yes, sir, frequently; but it's not the season yet." "Ah! I suppose it's all owing to a backward spring." "That's it, sir." The play recalls the manner of his ducking, and also involves the servant's idea, as if it depended upon the time of the year. This is witty, because it effects a temporary junction of very opposite ideas, apart from the pun which gives the opportunity.

Let a case in illustration be invented. Suppose a man hears that in the Quissama tribe of Angola any one who cannot pay his debts is at once killed and eaten. He improves this curious fact to say, "That would be a pretty effective way of collecting a debt, if debtors did not always disagree with creditors." This leads us to consider that wit takes place when two or more very distinct objects or perceptions are brought arbitrarily under the sway of one idea which for a moment appears to embrace them. Punning is a constraint of two different ideas to be expressed by one word. Wit is the constraint of different objects to be expressed by one idea. Wit depends for its effect upon ideas alone;

and it is reached whenever the mind suddenly forces an idea that is suggested to it to appear, for a moment, like something that belongs to another idea. The latter really resembles the first idea in no point at all: they ought to be kept asunder for want of a natural and organic connection. Yet they are compelled to seem to have this; and, though the illusion can last but for a moment, that is time enough to surprise and delight us with the mental stratagem. Perhaps the second idea, so far from having any natural relation with the first, is violently opposed to it in every sensible way, so that nobody can pretend a possibility that they should communicate. The mind contrives this momentary rendezvous; and a lightning-flash betrays these two heterogeneous things apparently in close communion.

But, although this is the metaphysical basis of all wit, we must notice the distinctions in its quality, according as it draws upon more or less of the imagination, and is more or less interfused with good-nature. It has a range of effects extending from a bitterness which may be ferocious through a cold cynicism, a clear, calm light of the understanding, into moods that are colored by fancy and warmed into geniality by a human heart; and then it becomes a favorite ally of humor to promote its intention of tolerating all our infirmities. Douglas Jerrold gives us examples of the caustic kind; Tom Hood, of its jollity; Charles Lamb, of its clearness; Richter, Sydney Smith, Shakspeare, of its broad humanity.

Some one asked Heine, "Have you read B.'s new

pamphlet?" "No, dear friend; I only read his great works: the three, four, and five-volumed ones suit me best." "Ah! you jest, and mean something." "Certainly: a great extent of water — a lake, sea, ocean — is a fine thing; but in a teaspoon I cannot stand it."

Heine said of one of his acquaintances, "The man is really cracked; but I will confess that he has lucid intervals when he is only foolish." This was the same person whom Heine had in his mind when he said to a caller, "My head to-day is perfectly barren, and you will find me stupid enough; for a friend has been here, and we exchanged ideas."

The old age of Lamartine exhibited a painful decline of his truly great qualities, and an exaggeration of his foibles. A French paper concluded his obituary with the remark, "He has ceased to survive himself."

These are caustic specimens; but the last one contains a high per cent of pleasure, because we are left uncertain whether it was a serious case of wit. But none of them can scald as Douglas Jerrold did, when, meeting a man who was such an abject toady that if his friend Jones had the influenza he would contrive to get up a cold, Jerrold said to him, "Have you heard the rumor that is flying around town?" "No." "Well, they say that Jones pays the dog-tax for you."

That is bitter. But when one gentleman during a supper of sheep's heads throws down his knife and fork in rapture, and exclaims, "Well, sheep's heads for ever, say I," and Douglas Jerrold remarks, "There's egotism," we have a point tempered in the flame of fun. So, too,

when a member of his club, hearing an air mentioned, said, "That always carries me away when I hear it," Jerrold, merely to seize an opportunity, said, "Then can nobody whistle it?" This kind of wit easily rankles, if there be a drop or two of suspicion in our veins; for there is nothing in the tone to announce its discrimination from ill-nature. For instance: Sheridan, soliciting the votes of the shoemakers of Stafford, exclaimed, "May the trade of Stafford be trampled under foot of all the world!" and mortally offended them.

We should like to know how the French attaché felt, who, being at a soirée just after the dubious affair of the annexation of Nice and Savoy to France, met Lord Houghton, as he went towards the supper-room, and said, "*Je vais prendre quelque chose.*" "*Vous avez raison,*" was the reply; "*c'est l'habitude de votre pays.*"

But the French abound in the kind of wit which penetrates like a colorless North light, and sets a contrast in clearness, so that we admire its outlines, scarcely smiling; as when Hippolyte Taine said, "An Englishman would be exceedingly mortified if he had no faith in another life." When the Duke de Choiseul, who was a remarkably lean man, came to London to negotiate a peace, Charles Townsend, being asked whether the French Government had sent the preliminaries of a treaty, answered that he did not know, but they had sent the outline of an ambassador. This preserves the French flavor, which we recognize, for instance, in Ninon de l'Enclos, who, being asked one day by a Parisian lady whether she believed that St. Denys walked *all* the way

to Paris with his head under his arm, replied, "*Pourquoi pas, Mademoiselle? ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.*"

The best repartee must subsidize the pleasure of wit. When M. Scribe replied to the millionnaire who wanted him to lend the use of his genius for a consideration, that it was contrary to Scripture for a horse and an ass to plough together, the man instantly parried the snub by saying, "By what right do you call me a horse?"

Among the announcements in a French paper, we find that "a young man about to marry wants to meet a man of experience who will dissuade him." So Abraham Lincoln thought he would not marry, because "I can never be satisfied with any one who would be blockhead enough to have me."

Perhaps the purest instance of thoroughly French wit is to be credited to Mr. Emerson. An amiable rustic once heard him lecture, but could make nothing of it. Turning to a friend, he said, "Darn it! I'd like to know what Emerson thinks about God. I bet I'll ask him." He did, when Mr. Emerson came down the aisle. "God," replied he, "is the x of algebra," — that is, the unknown quantity in every problem. Nothing could be more admirable.

Mr. Beecher affirms that "it is impossible to discriminate between the wit that produces only pleasure of thought and that which produces pleasure of laughter." It does not seem to me so hopeless a task to discriminate between the two kinds of wit. Where reflection predominates, and the act of wit approaches the statement of a truth, so that the surprise does not borrow

any tinge from any human sentiment, the pleasure will be inaudible; and, if we produce a smile at all, it will be where the German constructed the idea of a camel, — in the depths of his consciousness; as when Voltaire said of the priests of his time, "Our credulity makes all their knowledge." But when an American poet, whose Pegasus had stepped upon his foot, said, "What a pity it is! my grandfather left to me his gout, and nothing in the cellar to keep it up with," a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind; it is so incongruously human to nurse our own infirmities.

So when Frederic the Great said spitefully to Minister Elliot, on occasion of the Te Deums over the reverses of Hyder Ali in India, "I never knew that Providence was one of your allies," and Elliot replied, "The only one, sire, whom we do not pay," both the remark and the retort involve the mind in a momentary adjustment of its ideas to the new suggestion; and the wit is thus restrained from sallying into laughter. We have to reflect that Elliot's repartee is a hit at all subsidized powers, including Prussia, and also at his own nation for its trick of futile gratitude and ascription of praise. But if any movement of sympathy prevents the act of wit from settling upon the internal organs, and bids it escape by every pore, we feel the dew of laughter on the face; as when Falstaff whimsically apologizes for himself, "Thou knowest, in the state of innocency, Adam fell; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do, in the days of villany?" — or when, at a meeting in London to hear a report from some missionaries who had been sent to

discover the lost tribes of Israel, the chairman opened the business by saying, "I take a great interest in your researches, gentlemen. The fact is, I have borrowed money from all the Jews now known; and, if you can find a new set, you'll do me a favor."

It is witty when the author of the "Maid of Sker," describing a dinner, makes the mouth water with smiles when he particularizes "a little pig for roasting, too young to object to it, yet with his character formed enough to make his brains delicious."

Wit can depend, like punning, upon the felicitous use of some well-known verse or sentiment, which suddenly is made to adapt itself to a new idea; as when Henry Clapp, speaking of an intolerable bore, inverted the famous sentence which is associated with Shakspeare, and said, "He is not for a time, but for all day."

In the same vein, on the strength of Laurence Sterne's* assertion that "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," a Boston wit, finding himself in the powerful blast which sweeps across the Common and makes a tunnel of Winter Street, remarked that he wished there was a shorn lamb tied at the head of that street.

Walter Scott tells an anecdote of the same special character. "So deep was the thirst of vengeance impressed on the minds of the Highlanders that, when a clergyman informed a dying chief of the unlawfulness

* Sterne may have picked up this sentiment during his journey in France, when the donkey was bewept. At any rate, it is found in literature as early as 1594, when Henri Estienne wrote his "Prémices:" "*Dieu mesure le froid à la brebis tondue.*"

of the sentiment, urged the necessity of forgiving an inveterate enemy, and quoted, 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,' the acquiescing penitent said, with a deep sigh, 'To be sure! it is too sweet a morsel for a mortal.'"

Wit can be blundered into as well as a pun. The unmerited praise of it can be earned by mental awkwardness and want of tact. A widower, who had loved a lady previous to his marriage to another, approached his first love after the death of his wife, and sought to renew the old attachment. After he had made his offer, at a juncture more critical than the turning-point of Waterloo, he was permitted to add, "And I know that all my children will follow you to the grave with the same affection that they showed when their mother died." This is certainly the *pallida mors* of Horace beating *æquo pede* at the door.

Wit can also be enhanced by a droll incompetence of understanding on the part of the listener. Sydney Smith, complaining of the heat, told a lady that he wished he could take off his flesh and sit in his bones. The wit consists in extending the congruity of taking clothes off to the flesh, and there is an electric instant of mental possibility. But it is enhanced to us when we recollect the shocked and puzzled look of the lady, who saw only an indelicacy in a remark which was really delicate to the pitch of ghastliness, — stripped, in fact, of every rag of that most indelicate of all things, prudery. Thus the raillery of Falstaff owes half its excellence to Dame Quickly's consistent misinterpretation,

for this reflects back upon it the color of wit. She is a duenna who blunders into being a go-between and making a capital match. "Go to! you are a woman: go." "Who, I? No! I defy thee. God's light! I was never called so in mine own house before." "You are a thing to thank God on." "I am no thing to thank God on, I would thou should'st know it." And the grim irony of Hamlet, who, after killing Polonius, replies to the king that the old man is at supper, has grown upon us through the slow perception of the courtiers, who know he is killed as well as we do, and have been sent to find the body, but cannot take the point of Hamlet's answers.

In a play of Douglas Jerrold, an old sailor gets a box on the ear while trying to snatch a kiss. "There," cries he, "like my luck! always wrecked on the coral reefs." When the manager heard the play read he could not see the point, and increased the wit for us by making Jerrold strike it out.

Perhaps the best modern instance of this kind is the colossal stupidity of some foreign critics, who gave such an exquisite flavor to Mark Twain's "Innocents Abroad" by blaming his ignorance and misapprehension of places, pictures, and traditions.

The Beaufort negroes are unconsciously witty when, perceiving that an idea is dawning upon them, they say they feel their head "growing thinner." A premium for involuntary wit must be conferred upon the old lady in New Bedford, who heard about the cheapness of the manufactured oils and the great increase in the use of

them, which threatened to drive sperm-oil out of the market: "Dear me, the poor whales! What will they do?"

There must also be complete unconsciousness in the perpetrator of a bull. "The pleasure," says Sydney Smith, "arising from bulls proceeds from our surprise at suddenly discovering two things to be dissimilar in which a resemblance might have been suspected;" but ordinary wit creates a sudden surprise at a resemblance which could not have been suspected between two things. Perhaps the best bull was practically perpetrated by the old lady in Middlebury, Wis., who crossed over a bridge that was marked "Dangerous" without seeing the sign. On being informed of the fact on the other side, she instantly turned in great alarm and recrossed it.

The wit which produces laughter cannot be analyzed without a mental process: but that is an after-thought and laughter anticipates it; as when Mark Twain, writing upon Franklin, says, "He was twins, having been born simultaneously in two houses in Boston." There is an unconscious organic assumption that both houses, since people insist upon both, must have been the spots of his birth. If so, the births in two houses must have been simultaneous, but the two Franklins not identical. Of course, then, they must have been twins. At least, this is the best that can be done with the historical material. But I am reminded of a famous wit, who, after viewing the Siamese Twins for a while, quietly remarked, "Brothers, I suppose."

If wit ever unmasks a moral feeling it performs its noblest function and imparts a complicated pleasure; as when Abraham Lincoln, in defending a fugitive slave before a court, said, "It is singular that the courts will hold that a man never loses his right to his property that has been stolen from him, but that he instantly lost the right to himself if he was stolen."

When wit creates a temporary congruity between an idea and an object which are essentially incongruous on all points, the shock dissolves in pleasure, because the oppressiveness of life results from its ideas; and yet one of them opens to us an escape from it. We find a way of eluding for a moment a task-master, and it makes us smile. It is not a moral revolt, for that would be a deepening of the seriousness till it became too pathetic; but it is a momentary beguilement, and we are cheated into the presumption that there is no care in the world. We return to the care refreshed by this electric bath of wit, which has a tonic quality and saves us from despair.

WIT, IRONY, HUMOR.

WIT.

THE similes of poetry which select natural objects and fit human thoughts and emotions to them have the movement which belongs to wit. They suddenly take things which we have been in the habit of seeing all our lives without after-thought, just as we see a brick or a house; but, when thus taken, they become involved in sentiments which are also customary, and indulged by us without after-thought. We are surprised and charmed to notice what an apt comradeship springs up between the object and the sentiment.

> "Such tricks hath strong imagination,
> That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
> It comprehends some bringer of that joy."

Constantinople may be seen any day from the Bosphorus, stretching its length of domes and minarets across the sunset; but when Mr. Browning observes it he says it runs black and crooked athwart the splendor, "like a Turk verse along a scimitar." There occurs a moment of surprise; a lively shock is given to the mind, which would liberate itself into the smile of wit if we were not instantly conscious that the sudden aptness is also beautiful. All pure wit is born in the imagination, but only in that capability of it to see one point where two incongruous things may meet. But the poetic simile involves more than that: it is born of the inmost

vitality which must overflow, spill itself upon Nature, appropriate her, senseless as she may seem and incapable of reflecting our subtilties of mind and heart. Often there is something very noble and tender in this process of imagination, which converts surprise into emotion: as when Coleridge says, —

> "Methinks it should have been impossible
> Not to love all things in a world so filled;
> Where the breeze warbles, and the mute, still air
> Is music slumbering in her instrument."

This innate nobleness of the simile checks our smile, and if we feel any hilarity it belongs to that delighted health which mantles all through us when we recognize beauty. Perhaps the mind soared,

> "By means of that mere snatch, to many a hoard
> Of fancies: as some falling cone bears soft
> The eye, along the fir-tree spire, aloft
> To a dove's nest."

The simile gives us such a new perception of the mysterious relations of mind and Nature that we should not be surprised if the object designated had really, in the great involvement of all things, some secret affinity with the thought; perhaps the thought has recognized the family mark and claimed kinship. This is an exalted claim because it sets free our personality. We become superior to Nature, and are made aware that we can vivify her as the Creator can; but, as we also are creatures, we admit her to a tender and refining confidence. "Daffodils, that come before the swallow dares," "take the winds of March with beauty."

"The centre-fire heaves underneath the earth,
And the earth changes like a human face."
"Earth is a wintry clod,
But spring-wind, like a dancing psaltress, passes
Over its breast to waken it."
"The winds
Are henceforth voices, in a wail or shout,
A querulous mutter, or a quick, gay laugh, —
Never a senseless gust now man is born."

The imagination thus proclaiming the banns between spirit and matter reminds us of Wordsworth's dear maiden, of whom he says, —

"She was known to every star in heaven,
And every wind that blew."

The impression of surprise which a perfect simile produces is transferred from the understanding back to the imagination before the former can venture to be amused. But sometimes the surprise lingers there long enough to have a narrow escape from smiling; as when Sir Thomas Brown, finding that midnight has overtaken him at his desk, says, "To keep our eyes open longer, were to *act* the antipodes." His wakefulness is not only like the antipodal day, but dramatizes it; and this is a simile that imparts the shock of wit.

Here is one from Shakspeare that approaches it, but is intercepted by a sense of beauty: —

"These violent delights have violent ends,
And in their triumph die; like fire and powder,
Which, as they kiss, consume."

And he says that, when the people saw Anne Boleyn at her coronation, such a noise arose "as the shrouds make at sea in a stiff tempest." Mr. Browning makes

us smile when he paints the "poppy's red effrontery — till autumn spoils their fleering quite with rain,"

> "And, turbanless, a coarse, brown, rattling crane
> Protrudes."

This reminds me that in the West a bald man's head is spoken of as rising above the timber-line; which is quite in the style of American similes, as when Rufus Choate, who so frequently appeared to be saying to his jury, "If you have tears, prepare to shed them now," was described to be a man who always bored for water.

Charles Lamb commenting upon the following line from Davenport's King John and Matilda, —

> "And thou, Fitzwater, reflect upon thy *name*,
> And turn the *Son of Tears*," —

says, "Fitzwater: son of water." A striking instance of the compatibility of the *serious pun* with the expression of the profoundest sorrows. Grief as well as joy finds ease in thus playing with a word. Old John of Gaunt in Shakspeare thus descants on his name: "Gaunt, and gaunt, indeed;" to a long string of conceits which no one has ever yet felt to be ridiculous. The poet Wither, thus, in a mournful review of the declining estate of his family, says with deepest nature, —

> "'The very name of Wither shows decay.'"

But, in the following passage from John Fletcher's "Bonduca," pure poetry checks the laugh, —

> "I have seen these Britons that you magnify
> Run as they would have outrun time, and roaring,
> Basely for mercy, roaring; the light shadows,
> That in a thought scur o'er the fields of corn,
> Halted on crutches to them."

That is in the finest style of an exaggeration which has been inherited by Americans and is the source of much of their wit and humor. Here is a coarser specimen, but perfectly witty. A person, remarking to a famous criminal lawyer that his client would certainly go to hell, had for a reply, "Go to hell! he ought to be thankful that there is a hell he *can* go to."

This characteristic will recur under the head of Falstaff.

Some of the similes which Americans derive from their professions, and apply to persons, have all the character of wit. A farmer says of a meagre and unequal speech that it was "pretty scattering," alluding to ground crops that grow unevenly. An iron-founder will say of a speech that was all fusion and passion that, notwithstanding, it "didn't make a weld." Miners in the West use the word "color" for the finest gold in the ground. One of them remarked of a man who had been tried and found worthless, "I have panned him out clear down to the bed rock, but I can't even raise the color." Frequenters of the race-course mention a beaten politician as "the longest-eared horse they ever saw," as the ears hang to a jaded horse. And a Nantucket captain, when asked his opinion of a very rhetorical preacher, said, "He's a good sailor, but a bad carrier."

The poetry of Donne, Cowley, Suckling, and others of that epoch, easily furnish examples of similes which stop so far short of beauty that their aptness only serves to raise a smile. Suckling says, —

"Her feet beneath her petticoat
Like little mice stole in and out."

Cowley begins his Hymn to Night, —

"First-born of chaos, who so fair didst come
From the old negro's darksome womb,"

and we have to deny poetic freedom to this aboriginal contraband.

How charmingly, however, did the poor woman reply to the gentleman who found her watering her webs of linen cloth. She could not tell him even the text of the last sermon. "And what good can the preaching do you, if you forget it all?" "Ah, sir, if you will look at this web on the grass, you will see that as fast as ever I put the water on it the sun dries it all up, and yet, sir, I see it gets whiter and whiter." This is pure wit from the well of imagination, and the smile is as deep in it as truth.

It would be hazardous to liken a poet to a spider, we might think; but when Mr. Browning undertakes it, this dodger of brooms spins a web all dripping with the splendor of fancy. Mr. Browning speaks of young Sordello, the poet, as he dreams in the old castle and connects the events around him by absorbing surmises of his own: —

"Thus thrall reached thrall;
He o'erfestooning every interval,
As the adventurous spider, making light
Of distance, sports her threads from depth to height,
From barbican to battlement; so flung
Fantasies forth and in their centre swung
Our architect, — the breezy morning fresh
Above, and merry, — all his waving mesh

Laughing with lucid dew-drops rainbow-edged.
This world of ours by tacit pact is pledged
To laying such a spangled fabric low,
Whether by gradual brush or gallant blow."

Beauty has spun the poet and the insect into a cocoon out of which the splendid wings emerge; then wit takes up the thread with the conception of the prosaic old world's hostility to flimsy poesy, and we admire the sudden congruity which is established between two such irreconcilable objects.

Outside the domain of poetry involuntary wit lurks everywhere, even in passages of history whose passion seems capable of expunging all smiles upon the face. Two contrarious ideas may blend for a moment at one point, as when King Olaf put a pan of coals upon Eyvind's naked flesh until it broiled beneath them, and then asked, without suspecting any thing incongruous, "Dost thou now, O Eyvind, believe in Christ?" Here is a momentary inclusion of an act of belief under an act of physical pain. When in the course of time the deadly earnestness of Olaf fades away for us, we perceive the incongruity, but also perceive that Olaf, in sad simplicity, imagined there was congruity; or, he reflected, a pan of coals shall compel a congruity.

This grim practice of unconscious wit is heightened when we recollect that Christ was a person who declined to call down fire upon those who did not receive him; and such an incident affords us a ready passage from Wit into the domain of Irony.

IRONY.

Nature herself practised irony long before men had suffered from it enough to endow literature with its expressive form. She has always pretended to agree with our *penchant* for pleasant but noxious habits, and for a long time seems to be of our opinion that such ways of living are of a capital kind; but eventually she is fatigued because we misunderstand her, and exclaims by many a twinge, "You simpletons! I meant just the reverse." "Why didn't you say so at first?" we reply, as we smart to find we had been so prosaic when we thought we were so romantic; but the smart etches the shapes of tragedy upon the soul.

The mind uses irony when it gravely states an opinion or sentiment which is the opposite of its belief, with the moral purpose of showing its real dissent from the opinion. It must therefore be done with this wink from the purpose in it, so that it may not pass for an acquiescence in an opposite sentiment. It may be done so well as to deceive even the elect; and perhaps the ordinary mind complains of irony as wanting in straightforwardness. There is a moment of hesitation, when the mind stoops over this single intention with a double appearance, and doubts upon which to settle as the real prey. So that only carefully poised minds with the falcon's or the vulture's glance can always discriminate rapidly enough to seize the point. In this moment of action the pleasure of irony is developed, which arises from a

discovery of the contrast between the thing said and the thing intended. And this pleasure is heightened when we observe the contrast between the fine soul who means nobly, and his speaking as if he meant to be ignoble. Then the ignoble thing is doubly condemned, first, by having been briefly mistaken to be the real opinion of the speaker, and then by the flash of recognition of the speaker's superiority. Thackeray describes the high-minded intentions of Rebecca Sharp: "It became naturally Rebecca's duty to make herself, as she said, agreeable to her benefactors, and to gain their confidence to the utmost of her power. Who can but admire this quality of gratitude in an unprotected orphan? 'I am alone in the world,' said the friendless girl: 'well, let us see if my wits cannot provide me with an honorable maintenance.' Thus it was that our little romantic friend formed visions of the future for herself; nor must we be scandalized that, in all her castles in the air, a husband was the principal inhabitant. Of what else have young ladies to think but husbands? Of what else do dear mammas think? 'I must be my own mamma,' said Rebecca." Thus the great author confides to us his abhorrence of Vanity Fair.

In matters which are morally indifferent, irony is only a jesting which is disguised by gravity; as when we apparer tly agree with the notions of another person which are averse from our own, so that we puzzle him not only on the point of our own notion, but on the point of his own, and he begins to have a suspicion that he is not sound in the matter. This suspicion is derived

from the mind's instinctive feeling that irony is a trait of a superior person who can afford to have a stock of original ideas with which it tests opinion, and who holds them so securely that he can never play with them a losing game. The Bastard in King John indicates this superiority when he says, —

> "Well, whiles I am a beggar, I will rail,
> And say, — there is no sin but to be rich;
> And being rich, my virtue then shall be,
> To say, — there is no vice but beggary."

A man who pretends to hold the opposite of his own belief is morally a hypocrite, until we detect that slight touch of banter which is the proof of genuine irony. Then we see that he is honest though he equivocates, for he belies himself with sincerity. A man who can afford this is to that extent superior to the man who, whether right or wrong, is hopelessly didactic, and incapable of commending his own opinions by the bold ease with which he may deplore them.

It is irony when Lowell, speaking of Dante's intimacy with the Scriptures, adds, "They do even a scholar no harm." Jaques, in "As You Like It," is ironical when he indicates men by the actions of the wounded deer which augmented with tears the stream that did not need water, as men leave their money to those who have too much already. The herd abandons him: that is right, — misery parts company. Anon, they come sweeping by, and never stay to inquire into his hurt. That is just the proper fashion, too. "Sweep on, you fat and greasy citizens!" This pretence of praising the deer is a parable which arraigns mankind.

In the Old Testament there is an instance of irony, where the priests of Baal called on his name but there was no reply, and Elijah suggested that "either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." But the priests had all the prosaic singleness of an ignorant mind, and went on scarifying themselves with knives and lancets, as if Elijah had not already let their blood.

The New Testament furnishes a more delicate specimen in the parable of the unjust steward, which has difficulties of interpretation, arising from an unwillingness, perhaps, to recognize the irony. The steward is expecting to be dismissed for malfeasance in office. In the days of parable, whitewashing committees were unknown. He then expects to ingratiate himself with his lord's debtors by reducing the amount of their bills, hoping that some of them would take him up when discarded. It is not clear what commendation to a debtor who might also be a creditor lay in this fraudulent reduction of his bill; but a parable serves only the main point, which in this case is to show how much more tact a thoroughly worldly man has than a technically spiritual man. So the lord admires the shiftiness of his steward, because it had an ulterior purpose; whereas your conventional child of light has no genuine foresight. This is done to introduce the irony of the verse: "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." The master's

hint of the superior sagacity of the people of mammon is delightfully qualified by the irony that lurks in his use of the word "everlasting." Then the serious intent of the parable is clearly stated in the three succeeding verses.

When irony becomes persistently cynical it defeats the moral advantage which it would possess of attracting men to its serious meaning, because it then involves too large a tract of human life in its insinuation. The pretences that things are all bad may become so clamorous at the door of our faith in human nature that no good things can gain admission. In literature, an irony that is tinged a little with cynicism is a healthy recoil from sentimentalism: for an affected ideal, if too long and too floridly sustained, piques our knowledge of human nature into making inquiries; and, as it is in public affairs when people are aroused to investigate, the facts which are discovered receive too great a valuation. They seem to indicate that every thing is rotten; and while one temper denounces, another temper sneeringly inquires for virtue. In broad day, this lantern of Diogenes goes about hunting up an honest citizen. "There is nothing but roguery to be found in villanous man."

The strained and almost impossible goodness of Dickens's "Battle of Life" is punished by the cool depreciation of Thackeray's pen. When the former insists too strongly that his humble characters shall be examples of all the British beatitudes, the latter depicts too easily sharpers and nonentities for women,

and well-bred, high-toned rascals for men. But when a too fluent and prolific imagination, working in the steam of a great modern centre, has its shapes distorted, and the outlines waver into caricature, a tonic breath with the taste of brine in it will always set in to temper this radiation. Then it is inevitable that we shiver and complain that the tone has been reduced too far. When a skilfully distended bubble breaks, and only a thin spat of suds is left, a cynic finger will point to it as if to say, "Here's your fine iris all gone to unserviceable soap." But there is a solider ball, the earth itself, upon which human nature paints its zones; and although life is despicable at the poles, and revolting in many a foul quarter, we know that noble landscapes stocked with graciousness and honor spread on every side. Shakspeare alone seems to have this bubble hanging securely from his pipe, where it sheds the swift glances of myriad eyes.

Thackeray says, "How can I hold out the hand of friendship, when my first impression is, 'My good sir, I strongly suspect that you were up my pear-tree last night'? It is a dreadful state of mind. The core is black; the death-stricken fruit drops on the bough, and a great worm is within, — fattening and feasting and wriggling. Who stole the pears? I say. Is it you, brother? Is it you, Madam?"

These suspicions cannot conceal their good humor: the one hand drives the railing pen; the other, behind the chair, holds the glimmer, not of steel, but of a smile.

But when Swift writes a chapter upon the use and improvement of madness in a Commonwealth, the smile which scantily flickers over the surface of it is the smile of the Spartan boy while the fox was gnawing at his vitals. Swift's pen makes the Iron Madonna's gestures of invitation, — she that stood in mediæval torture-chambers and bade the bewildered prisoner take refuge in her opening arms, where a thousand lancets pricked life, faith, and hope away.

At one time, the German Heine's irony smacks of good humor ; at another, you would ask for a bumper of gall to sweeten your mouth. He represents two fat Manchester ladies at a particularly exposed ballet, murmuring to each other, "Shocking! For shame!" And he says that they were so benumbed with horror that they could not for an instant take their opera-glasses from their eyes, and consequently remained in that situation to the last moment, when the curtain fell.

By and by we hear a change of tone. "I always obeyed the one commandment, that we should love our enemies ; for, ah! those persons whom I have best loved were always, without my knowing it, my worst enemies." And again : "Madame, you can readily form an idea of what life is like in heaven, — the more readily, as you are married."

This style of innuendo is always more good-natured in Thackeray ; as when speaking in the character of a widower, who remembers the late Mrs. Brown, he says : "By a timely removal she was spared from the grief which her widowhood would have doubtless caused her,

and I acquiesce in the decrees of Fate in this instance, and have not the least regret at not having preceded her."

Heine also can be pleasantly mischievous. When he was about to travel from Lyons to Paris in the old days of diligences, a friend commissioned him to carry one of the colossal Lyons sausages to a homœopathic doctor in the capital. But Heine and his wife were so frequently hungry, and had trespassed so often upon the length of the sausage, that a very small end remained on their arrival. Heine thereupon shaved off a transparent slice with a razor, and enclosed it in the following letter to the doctor: "*My dear Sir*, — Your researches have helped to establish the fact that millionths produce the greatest effects. Pray receive herewith the millionth part of a Lyons sausage, which your friend consigned to you. In case your theory be true, it will have the effect of the whole sausage upon you."

Irony employs wit to feather its purport. A Frenchman said of a man who never really did make a witty remark: "How full of wit that man must be! he never lets any escape." That, when translated, is improved because the English word *any* can refer at once to no wit and to no person's escaping the effect of wit. Thus the irony is increased.

One of the most characteristic and important specimens of irony is Thackeray's "Philip," a story of a villanous doctor who deceives a woman with a mock marriage, deserts her, and marries a lady with expectations, who has a son Philip and dies. But the traitor is

endowed with an impressive amount of deportment, and his starched front and cravat seem to have been secreted by the stiffest of spotless souls, in a rapture of rigidness. This carapace of deportment is gradually worn too thin; for it has been put to rough service on all occasions to supply the place of virtue and to make its absence appear no calamity. The irony consists in accepting this deportment as if it were really put forth by an estimable man. The book is one long strain of grave assumption that Dr. Firmin is a good man and a killing physician; but the reader knows better on the first point, and enjoys tasting the man's villany through this pretence. And it is kept up long after the deportment becomes like the pantaloons of the stingy lawyer, which hung in his garret labelled thus, "Too old to wear, too good to give away." It is still good enough for Dr. Firmin; and he reaches a respectable grave in ignorance that we know him so thoroughly, and discovers rather late that he was always well known at the head-quarters of genius.

The story is a wonderfully sustained innuendo of rascality, carried on by this ironical pretence of virtue. Thackeray appears in it to be as green as Dr. Firmin's dupes; but the mask is lifted a little in every sentence, and the author and the reader peeping in at opposite sides, their eyes meet, and smiles at what they have discovered are exchanged.

Even the little sister, who becomes a living mother to the Philip of the dead lady, cannot flee from this great tide of irony, which catches her and stands up to her

heart. The author is constantly deprecating her love for Philip; though he knows it is the sweet flower of her life that is fed from the ugly soil of her betrayal. Why will she go on so with that boy, and save up money for him, and extemporize little treats with brandy and water *ad libitum*, and believe in him when he tries to become a bad magazine writer, and believe in his fortune when he marries a beggar, and, in short, believe that she was sent into the world to be deceived, and then have a great, blundering, brave, pure, splendid Philip, as if by bequest from a legal mother? Why in Heaven's name does she not blow upon the doctor, and make a good thing out of betraying his contemptible meanness? Gracious goodness! why is she so expensively magnanimous? Would you, Madame, be so extravagant as to pinch yourself in that way to be faithful and tender to a seducer out of faith and tenderness for his wife's boy? But, there he is: God set such a pure amen to a hideous deed, and she is the woman to say, Amen, after him; for God is just and watches the index of the balance. What! shall she compete with God for retribution? So her life is a long sacrifice to the purest and most mute devotion, and our author banters her to keep the tears from obscuring the page at which he writes.

This charming insinuation of the great observer, who once said of himself that he had no head above his eyes, proves to us that he had a mighty truly-beating heart below them; and we reverently accept the little mother from his shaping hands, to place her in our Val-

halla of Women, where Portia, Imogen, and Cordelia have long languished for her company.

If irony does not forget good nature in its indignation at discovered shams, it can impart the exhilaration of wit. In a late novel, entitled the "Maid of Sker," there is a fishmonger who says that, "when the eyes of a fish begin to fail him through long retirement from the water," he has means of setting up their aspect; "and I called" my patrons "generous gentlemen and Christian-minded ladies every time they wanted to smell my fish, which is not right before payment. What right has another man to disparage the property of another? When you have bought him, he is your own; but, when he is put in the scales, remember 'nothing but good of the dead,' if you remember any thing."

This recalls Hamlet's irony, when he said that he knew Polonius excellent well, — he was a fishmonger! "Not I, my lord." "Then I would you were so honest a man." Poor, stale Polonius! He was not as fresh as the fish which Shakspeare used to scent at Billingsgate, and knavery in the wind besides.

The cynicism of irony can be illustrated by the character of Jaques in "As You Like It," as the character of Apemantus in "Timon of Athens" will serve to show us a cynicism that has grown so ferocious as almost to beat irony from the field.

JAQUES.

There is not a spark of unkindly feeling in Puck when he says to Oberon, concerning the lovers, —

> "Shall we their fond pageant see?
> Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

But when we overhear Jaques telling Orlando, "By my troth, I was seeking for a fool, when I found you," there is a tang of seedy beer in the speech. We suspect his common-sense of having soured: so that when he says to Orlando, "The worst fault you have is to be in love," we relish the estimate of Orlando's reply, "'Tis a fault I will not change for your best virtue."

The melancholy of Jaques is the cynicism of a man who is *blasé* with the convictions as well as the manners of society. He enjoys his vein too well to be melancholy in the modern sense of that word, for being something more than satirical he is something less than morose, and we feel that he is secretly pleased with his ability to be displeasing. Every vice lends a man a feeling of superiority in being different from other men: he broke through some bounds to acquire it, and this action contains some spice of originality and independence. He transgresses in a temper of pity for the less audacious and unchartered souls. So the cynic who makes his whole vicinity uncomfortable is pleasant company for himself because he has no mawkishness; you cannot cheat him with superfine emotions, he happens to have seen the world.

Jaques characterizes the use of the word "melancholy" as applied to himself, when he says: "It is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness." He has also gained his experience at the expense of having tried various vices of high life, as the Duke hints: "For thou thyself hast been a libertine." So the arsenic eaters of the Styrian Alps take the natural poison in small successive doses which give them a bloated aspect of florid health, but they so affect the action of the heart that it stops quite suddenly.

The famous speech beginning with, "All the world's a stage," is purely cynical, and assumes the futility of the parts which the necessity of living compels us to play. It might be spoken by one who believes that our little life is rounded by a sleep whose pure oblivion swallows up our striving.

When Jaques calls for more singing, and is told that it will make him melancholy, he replies, "I thank it: I can suck melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs." We may infer that he sucks music with the notion of the weasel, who probably regards eggs as being laid on purpose for his sucking. There is nothing more ferrety than your cynic, to whom all objects are game for observation. When he hears that Duke Frederic, the usurper, has restored the kingdom and "put on a religious life," he goes to find him for the purpose of critical inspection; for "out of these con-

vertites there is much matter to be heard and learned." So Jaques surmising that every hole leads to a rat does not leave one unexplored. In the matter of music Jaques only cares for his sad reverie, not for the names of the songs. He will thank nobody. "When a man thanks me heartily, methinks I have given him a penny, and he renders me the beggarly thanks." So, sing, if you choose to: the song tracks me to that rat behind the arras.

Compare his scirrhous habit of assimilating music with that of the Duke in "Twelfth Night." Love has an appetite for music: give me excess of it to kill the love. Enough: it is not so sweet as before; for love is like the sea, as vast, as real, as domineering. When the brooks of music fall into it, sweet as they are, genuine as love, yet the great sea subdues them to a greater disposition, even in a minute; and my fancy for Olivia is alone "high-fantastical." Jaques would have sneered at this Duke for not extracting from the music a suspicion of the frailty of his love. No matter what a man's gifts may be, this "vicious mole of nature" that pretends to spread over all surfaces discolors only the gifts: all virtues, "in the general censure, take corruption from that particular fault," and to its own scandal; because the world is a flower that nods upon the stock of reality, and the particles of its aroma, though invisible, set in motion the nerves of a corresponding reality, and man does not put his nose to an illusion. But your debauchee, like Jaques, has scorched and tanned his senses with misuse, and his abortive sniffing at the roses sours into a sneer.

Still, Jaques in defending himself makes disclaimers of ill-nature: as thus, Who is hit by my speech? It means so and so. If the coat does not fit, who is wronged? If a man be above my estimate, "why, then, my taxing like a wild goose flies, unclaimed of any man."

Yes, but he really delights himself with the conviction that every man is a wild goose upon the wing, and that virtue is the last game that ventures to alight and feed on the wild celery of our ponds.

Jaques reserves his last and cruelest thrust for Touchstone, to whom he predicts a marriage victualled for two months, and wrangling ever after; which is hard on the wise fool, who has taken up with Audrey as if to show the under side of court manners and the comparative cheapness of mere breeding. This ought to have endeared him to the heart of the cynic.

APEMANTUS.

Apemantus, in "Timon of Athens," is a cynic of a different breed, and his temper is so acid that, as was once said of Douglas Jerrold, he must have been suckled on a lemon. There is spleen in it when he says: "Would I had a rod in my mouth, that I might answer thee profitably." The cynicism of Apemantus is partly justified by the generous folly of Timon: "Now, Apemantus, if thou wert not sullen, I'd be good to thee." "No, I'll nothing: for if I should be bribed too, there would be none left to rail upon thee, and then thou would'st sin

the faster." Shakspeare seems to indicate how a virtue, pushed to excess, provokes excessive criticism. We are continually generating these extremes, when our social virtue piques some social fault into parading itself. Money maxims and manners are good things, but they may all be strained to bankruptcy. So when Timon becomes a fanatic of good-nature we see him developing a monstrous Apemantus: his virtue, like an overgrown fruit, becomes stringy and deprived of proper flavor. We taste its coarseness in the colossal spleen of the cynic who says, as Timon turns away from the repulsive tone which was really sired by himself:—

> "Thou wilt not hear me now: thou shalt not then, *I'll lock Thy heaven from thee.*"

So it will always be: if the kingdom of heaven is claimed by one violence, it will be competed for by another.

Apemantus is specially reared to be this bitter foil to Timon's profuseness. He leads an isolated life, and thus like all solitaries acquires the vice of exaggerating his own opinions. They have never passed between the fine emery of social contact. So he is a caltrop in men's path, with a spike always uppermost to impale the over-hasty feet. Poverty drives Timon directly upon it, to wince at every step he takes on such a bristly virtue, till he matches his smart with curses quite as pointed; and Shakspeare shows us the two fanatics of two virtues exhausting the vituperations of the English tongue to banish each other into an oblivion, "where the light foam of the sea may beat" their gravestones daily with a bitter lip.

TIM. When there is nothing living but thee, thou shalt be welcome.
I had rather be a beggar's dog, than Apemantus.
APEM. Thou art the cap of all the fools alive.
TIM. Would thou wert clean enough to spit upon.
APEM. A plague on thee, thou art too bad to curse.
TIM. Away, thou issue of a mangy dog!
Choler does kill me, that thou art alive;
I swoon to see thee.
APEM. Beast!
TIM. Slave!
APEM. Toad!
TIM. Rogue, rogue, rogue!

So people who never know "the middle of humanity," but "the extremity of both ends," batter each other's virtue out of shape and capacity to be recognized.

Julian Hawthorne likens the cynic to a chimney-sweeper, "that eccentric misanthrope who vents his spite against the race by plucking defilement from the very flame which makes bright the household hearth."

But Jaques was expressly plunged into social estimates and manners that he may be withdrawn from them in a less splenetic temper. The wild crab has sunned itself in orchards, and, nodding among mellower branches, is not all flavored with their rottenness. So far from secluding himself in the conceited fashion of all hermits from the manifold culture of life, he has expended himself upon every phase of it, and withdraws with the pensiveness of satiety toning the sharpness of experience in his speech. Some men turn cynics when the first serious disappointment of their lives drifts over them. Of a sudden the whole nature is drenched from the leaden cloud. The revulsion from a sunny day to this pitiless blackening of heaven chills the very marrow of their

common-sense. Then they rail at the sky which is but for a while retired, and insist that its old grace and clearness were a subterfuge. So when the accursed plot of Iachimo to make the chastity of Imogen a naughty thing has its effect, her husband, Posthumus, sets the key for all the woman-haters since: —

"Could I find out
The woman's part in me! For there's no motion
That tends to vice in man, but I affirm
It is the woman's part: Be it lying, note it,
The woman's; flattering, hers; deceiving, hers;
Lust and-rank thoughts, hers, hers; revenges, hers;
Ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain,
Nice longings, slanders, mutability,
All faults that may be named, nay, that hell knows,
Why, hers, in part, or all; but, rather, all;
For ev'n to vice
They are not constant, but are changing still
One vice, but of a minute old, for one
Not half so old as that. *I'll write against them.*"

HUMOR.

If we wished to find a passage from Irony to Humor, we should have to look for it in cases where good-nature assumes the positive attribute of impartiality, because humor is a kind of disposition to adopt the whole of human nature, fuse all its distinctions, tolerate all its infirmities, and assemble vice and misery to receive rations of good cheer.

Two Jews have been elected within a few years to be Lord Mayors of London. They were members of the synagogue in full connection, and might have appointed

Rabbins for chaplaincies if they had chosen. But they pursued the old custom, which was not however of legal stringency: appointed clergymen of the Church of England, and regularly made all the usual contributions for Christian purposes, including the customary one to the Society for the Conversion of the Jews. In this incident it is the element of Humor which imparts to us the pleasure we feel.

Hippolyte Taine acknowledges that the French have not the idea of Humor, nor the word for it. But we might expect from him at least a definition. He can only say, however, that humor includes a taste for contrasts, buffooneries, the mockery of Heine, starts of invention, oddities, eruption of a violent joviality that was buried under a heap of sadness, and absurd indecency. In another place he says that English humor "is the product of imaginative drollery, or of concentrated indignation."

Sir Henry Bulwer, in his book entitled "France, Social, Literary, and Political," concedes the talent of wit to the French and quotes the following instance of it: "I asked two little village boys, one seven, the other eight years old, what they meant to be when they were men? Says one, 'I shall be the doctor of the village.' 'And you, what shall you be?' said I to the other. 'Oh! if brother's a doctor, I shall be *curé*. He shall kill the people, and I'll bury them; so we shall have the whole village between us.'"

Bulwer appreciates this, yet Taine denies to the English the sense of wit. In fact, the quality of wit

exists wherever imagination percolates through the understanding: the sediment is the grain-gold of wit. But the quality of humor, depending upon various moral traits, exists only wherever a broad imagination is combined with a sweet and tolerant moral sense that is devoid of malice and all uncharitableness, and at peace with all mankind. A petulant egotism may exist with wit, but never with humor. Sarcasm and satire are the forms which best agree with imperfect moral dispositions. A too prolonged irony has something melancholy and dyspeptic in it, and passes into the blood of a faulty temper even if there be the tonic of an upright moral sense. This moral sense may exist on every meridian of the earth, but it may not appear at literary epochs in solution with the brightest minds. Rabelais seems to be a French exception to the Gallic trait that was noticed so long ago by the great Roman: *Comœda* and *argute loqui*, — belonging to comedy and to the ingenuities of conversation. Humor appears best in conjunction with the temper of Northern Europe, whose early races began with deep impressions of the gravity of things and broke thence into alleviating moods. If it be the primitive trait of a nation to enjoy comic gayeties and the subtle surprises of discourse, it does not readily rise to the moral earnestness which a serious world imposes, and therefore it cannot invent the relief and grave delight of humor.

Sydney Smith uses this word to cover any thing that is ridiculous and laughable. So the epithet *comic* is quite indiscriminately applied. But we ought not to

submit to this loose application; for there are plenty of other words to make proper distinctions for us amid our pleasurable moods, and permit us to reserve humor for something which is neither punning, wit, satire, nor comedy. Humor may avail itself of all these mental exercises, but only as a manager casts his stock company to set forth the prevailing spirit of a play. Comedy, for instance, represents sorrows, passions, and annoyances, but shows them without the sombre purpose of tragedy to enforce a supreme will at any cost. All our weaknesses threaten in comedy to result in serious embarrassments, but there is such inexhaustible material for laughter in the whims and follies with which we baffle ourselves and others, that the tragic threat is collared just in time and shaken into pleasure. All kinds of details of our life are represented, which tragedy could never tolerate in its main drift towards the pathos of defeated human wills and broken hearts. Tricks, vices, fatuities, crotchets, vanities, play their game for a stake no higher than the mirth of outwitting each other; and they all pay penalties of a light kind which God exacts smilingly for the sake of keeping our disorders at a minimum. Comedy also funds a great deal of its charm in the unconsciousness of an infirmity. We exhibit ourselves unawares: each one is perfectly understood by everybody but himself; so we plot and vapor through an intrigue with placards on each back, where all but the wearers can indulge their mirth at seeing us parading so innocently with advertisements of our price and quality.

There is a comic passage in the "Inferno" of Dante, noticed by Lowell (XV. 119), "where Brunetto Latini lingers under the burning shower to recommend his *Tesoro* to his former pupil," Dante; "a comical touch of Nature in an author's solicitude for his little work; not, as in Fielding's case, after *its*, but his own damnation."

The opening verses of Canto XVI. of the "Paradiso" are also comic, "where Dante tells us how, even in heaven, he could not help glorying in being gently born, — he who had devoted a *Canzone* and a book of the *Convito* to proving that nobility consisted wholly in virtue."

Humor subsidizes every vein like this to supply the great heart-beat which mantles over all human features and visits all the members of great or little honor. Irony is jesting hidden behind gravity. Humor is gravity concealed behind the jest. Our grave and noble tendencies are brought in this world of ours into contact with very ordinary styles of living, which are stubborn; they neither surrender nor give way. Humor steps in to mediate: it seeks to put in the same light and color all the parts of this incongruity, the ideal and the vulgar real; and the constant inference of humor is that all the ideals of right, honor, goodness, manly strength, are serious with a divine purpose.

Even the coarsest and most revolting things can be adopted by this temper and cheerfully assigned to their places in the great plan. Jamie Alexander, the old Scotch grave-digger, had the habit of carrying home

fragments of old coffins, long seasoned in the earth which was turned up by his exploring spade. He used to make clocks and fiddles of them, thus coaxing time and tune out of these repulsive tokens of human infirmity. Our mouldiest accessories can furnish material for humor; since "a good wit," says Shakspeare, "will make use of any thing; it will turn diseases to commodity."

We cannot say that man derives this power to resolve contrariety into delight from the divine mind, though we have the habit of saying that every intellectual act must spring from an original source of intelligence, just as affection must have its root in the infinite love. But Deity can have no consciousness of incongruities in creation, because the whole must at every instant be comprehended in the Creator of the whole, who originates the real relation of all its parts and their mutual interdependence. Human dissatisfaction springs from want of this ability to comprehend the whole within one reconciling idea. This incompetency is felt by us because we have an instinct that all dissonant things ought to be reconciled, and can be in some way, but only can be by the finite becoming the infinite. Humor strives to bridge this gulf. It is man's device to pacify his painful sense that so many things appear wrong and evil to him, and so many circumstances inconsistent with our feeling that Deity must have framed the world in a temper of perfect goodness. We get relief by trying to discover the ideas which may effect a temporary reconcilement, to approach as far as we can to the temper of divine impartiality in which all circumstances must have

been ordained. That temper passing down through our incompleteness is refracted, broken all up into a tremulousness of human smiles. Nothing that a Creator has the heart to tolerate can disturb him. But where there is no sense of incongruity there can be no sense of humor. That sense is man's expedient to make his mortality endurable. The laughter of man is the contentment of God.

Shakspeare was not preoccupied by any theory of the universe which denies the facts or tries to shut them up in a private meaning, as theology does. His creative genius reflected a Creator's mind. So he accepted all that is permitted to exist, without extenuation, instinctively acknowledging the right of God to make men as they are, if so He chose, out of complex motives and passions whose roots are hidden in each man's ancestry, and whose drift the man himself cannot anticipate, as he was not consulted. This admission of all the facts of human nature did not disable his preference for pure and honest things. All that is lovely has a good report made of it in his lives, and all that is odious appears in its habit as it lived. Thus he moralized, as Nature does by letting all her creatures breed and show their traits. She pastes no placards upon things which advertise themselves to every observer. All our infirmities have the freedom of Shakspeare's verse to display themselves at pleasure. He is not standing by with a showman's stick to designate his creatures to us who have eyes of our own, and know what is ugly and pleasant when we see it. No perfume is added to the violet, no gilding to

the rose. "The image of a wicked heinous fault" lives in its eye.

Now this impartial observation cannot shield the poet's ideal from the hurts which are inflicted by the discrepancies of life: the real seems to be no legitimate child of the ideal, but a changeling with low-born traits. The noble lover of goodness cannot help being pained at the contrast of circumstances with his thought, and there moves over his nature a deep seriousness from this cloud, beneath which his imagination broods upon the landscape. It raises a suspicion that Deity itself must find omniscience annoying and provocative of gloom; for all the worlds and the ages keep on inflicting this incongruity upon the divine source of all ideal things. The poet must manage to recover from this mood, to reassure his heart with the faith that the One who calculated and devised the aberrations which sustain His system must exist in eternal serenity.

When many human characters are contemplated by a superior observer, an impartiality kin to that of the mind who created them sets in. But it cannot remain a colorless, judicial attitude, nor can it deteriorate into indifference. Good nature is an element in the superiority of a good observer. He may make use of wit, comedy, and irony, but his essential mood can only be described by the word "humor;" that is, the quality of being reconciled with all that is observed. The poet would fain conciliate, but without complicity; for he can never give up the gravity of his ideal. Now to be perfectly impartial to all would be too great a strain for a finite mind. It

would weary of the incessant balancing, of the exigency of moderation. The mind yields from this in unconscious self-defence, and passes into a mood that conciliates itself. The gravity is precipitated by the infusion of a smile. And although this lighter ingredient appears upon the surface, it is the record and announcement of the serious affair below.

In Burns's "Address to the Deil," he is of opinion that that personage cannot take much pleasure in tormenting poor devils like him. Besides, if any thing is the matter with him, it is all the fault of the devil's own trick which so nearly ruined every thing. Still, he confesses to a fellow-feeling for the devil. Why can't he mend a bit? Burns hates to think of hell for the devil's sake, as Dr. Channing once said he hoped there was no devil for the devil's own sake.

But, as Shakspeare says, "the devil knew not what he did when he made man politic; he crossed himself by it; and I cannot think, but, in the end, the villanies of man will set him clear."

The humor here is pervaded with the earnest perception that Nature contains organically the good and the evil. Both are placed in permanent juxtaposition, to result in the interaction which makes life and history possible.

We notice the same touch of humor in Goethe's Prologue to "Faust." The Lord gives full permission to Mephistopheles to try his hand at Faust:—

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Dust shall he eat for pleasure's sake,
Like my old famous aunt, the snake.

THE LORD.

Just freely as you please, do I reply:
I never hated people of your kind;
Of all the spirits that deny
The knave is he best suits my mind.
Since man soon tires and thinks that labor's evil,
For unconditioned rest he sighs;
And so I'm glad to pique his enterprise
By a provoking comrade, like the devil.

The Lord has always tolerated this element on a compulsion of his own. But whenever creeping plants that have extorted bitter drops from the world around their roots climb over Shakspeare's sunny exposure, the clusters grow fit for human lips and are crushed into smiles.

The characters of humor in Shakspeare promote the business of the play, but they do it as much by being special studies of the traits of human nature as by necessary complicity with the plot. Sometimes they appear, as they would to a Frenchman like Voltaire, to be absurdities interpolated in the texture of the plot as if merely to raise a laugh and stretch the mouths of the groundlings. The notion is not uncommon, even among cultivated people, that they are drolleries contrived to suspend the strain of the more serious portions of the play; the poet assuming that the average mind cannot bear gravity for a whole evening. And doubtless great numbers of spectators find this relief in the lighter scenes into which they step down the stairs of

the blank verse, rather tired and strained. They only notice that they are amused. But the characters of humor flow out of a natural logic that is behind the plot, which cannot be apprehended without them. They are essential to it because they are intrinsically logical, however little they may appear to be woven along with the rest of the texture. But they are in fact, as all human life is, a seamless piece constructed at a single loom.

Why for instance, in the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," does Launce enter, leading his dog, just after Proteus and Julia have exchanged rings, and they part, she too much overcome to respond to his tender farewell? What an impertinent soliloquy which describes Launce's parting, too, from his family to follow Proteus, all of them dissolved in tears except Crab the dog! What does this bit of vulgar life in such a connection? It introduces the essential vulgarity of Proteus himself, who, we shall see, has the remembrance of Julia driven out of his heart by Silvia as soon as he has turned his back. To obtain her he plays a mean trick upon his dearest friend who loves her. In the midst of this Launce intrudes again; for he has fallen in love, and gives us what he calls the "cat-log" of his girl's conditions. It is as if the trivial disposition of Proteus was suddenly dumped upon its proper refuse-heap by the fine verse which held it. And we soon perceive why this dog Crab was trotted into the company; for Proteus procures a dog of gentle breed and bids Launce carry it as a present to Silvia. But it is stolen from

him, and Launce substitutes his own vicious cur who behaves badly in Silvia's presence, and is whipped out. This is just what Proteus is doing in love. Launce's shift is the shabbiness of Proteus, and Silvia dismisses it as summarily as she disposed of Crab; for she is not "so shallow, so conceitless," as to trust such a born flirt as Proteus. Shakspeare certainly has not left a shred of sentiment hanging to the back of Proteus's meanness; for Launce, who is a kind of choragus of it, is furnished with the most vigorous vulgarity which the vernacular contains. Especially we see what a satirical dog Crab is.

"The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together; our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not: and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues." *

With that for our text, let us approach some characters of Shakspeare.

When the requisition of the English government for the surrender of Mason and Slidell in the Trent affair was made through Lord Lyons, Judge Hoar rode out to see an old Concord farmer whom he highly respected, to tell him the news, which he did with considerable excitement. The farmer listened coolly, and said, "Well, if those fellows are really going in for the rebels and slavery, you tell Lord Lyons he may have my copy of Shakspeare."

But I suspect that New England farmers are content to be patriotic without cultivating the poet's page.

* French Gentleman in "All's Well that Ends Well," iv. 3.

Shakspeare may be everywhere extensively owned without being mentally possessed. We need a Shakspearian piety. Formerly the Bible and a copy of Josephus or some protracted commentary stood within reach of the household, and the leaves were turned by Religion herself who found her own meaning in every text and the meaning inexhaustible. If the volume of Shakspeare could attract a sympathy so loyal and grave as that, Religion would find in him, too, her counterpart. But we do not read Shakspeare yet in spiritual faith, as Bibles are pondered for their consecrated sense. Literature swarms with books of criticism which exhaust invention for theories of his life, profession, and intent; and the various editions of his works are liberally patronized. But where are the devotees whose morning orison is the wonderful liturgy of his imagination, with responses that are intoned by human nature itself, the acknowledgment that mind and heart are surprised by their own detection, yet with as little fear and as much confidence as we repay to omniscience? This is rare, this persistent recurrence of the soul to his enlightening, this praying before the shrine of every verse in which a thought, a passion, a humor, a delight, a beauty, is the saint. Must we have, then, professorships of Shakspeare to instruct the youth and inculcate this natural piety? Rather let every household accuse its own indifference, and endow its hearts to make him more widely felt and understood. For there are sweetness and light, wisdom and conscience and self-knowledge slumbering unmined below those covers.

DOGBERRY, MALVOLIO,

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA (AJAX),

BOTTOM, TOUCHSTONE.

DOGBERRY.

THE advocates of the theory that Lord Bacon wrote Shakspeare's plays like to point to the coincidences of phrase between Dogberry's Charge to the Watch in "Much Ado about Nothing," and Bacon's "Office of Constables." They may be found in Judge Holmes's "Authorship of Shakspeare," 2d ed. pp. 324, 326, and are plainly Dogberry's misapplications of terms used in some municipal code or usage for constables which was common in Shakspeare's time. They may have been only transmitted in the form of oral instructions before being codified by Bacon, but at any rate they were well known and highly relished by Shakspeare as specimens of rural pomp in language. So that although the play was first acted in the autumn of 1599, and Bacon did not publish his manual until 1608, the force of referring the coincidences to Bacon is lost by considering that every village youth between Stratford and London must have often heard the petty constables, which were elected by the people, instructed in the phrases so comically misapplied by Dogberry.

And at first it seems as if Shakspeare intended by the introduction of Dogberry and his ineffective watch merely to interpolate a bit of comic business, by parodying the important phrases and impotent exploits of the suburban constable. But Dogberry's mission extended

farther than that, and is intimately woven with delightful unconsciousness on his part into the fortunes of Hero.

Dogberry is not only immortal for that, but his name will never die so long as village communities in either hemisphere elect their guardians of the peace and clothe them in verbose terrors. If the town is unfortunately short of rascals, the officer will fear one in each bush, or extemporize one out of some unbelligerent starveling to show that the majestic instructions of his townsmen have not been wasted on him. This elaborate inefficiency is frequently selected by busy communities, because so few persons are there clumsy enough to be unemployed. Such a vagrom is easily comprehended. Dogberry has caught up the turns and idioms of sagacious speech, and seems to be blowing them up as life-belts; so he goes bobbing helplessly around in the froth of his talk. "I leave an arrant knave with your worship; which, I beseech your worship, to correct yourself, for the example of others. I humbly give you leave to depart; and if a merry meeting may be wished, God prohibit it." He ties his conversation in hopeless knots of absurdity; when pomp takes possession of a vacuous mind, it rattles like the jester's bladder of dried pease. Have not his fellow-citizens invested him? He will then lavish the selectest phrases. I heard a village politician once say with scorn in town-meeting, "Mr. Moderator, I know nothing about your technalities." Dogberry is the most original of Malaprops, says to the Prince's order that it shall be suffigance, and tells the

watch that salvation were a punishment too good for them, if they should have any allegiance in them. He has furnished mankind with that adroit phrase of conversational escape from compromise, "Comparisons are odorous." Where common men would suspect a person, Dogberry says the person is auspicious. His brain seems to be web-footed, and tumbles over itself in trying to reach swimming water; as when he says, "Masters, it is proved already that you are little better than false knaves, and it will go near to be thought so shortly." This is the precipitancy of a child's reasoning.

His own set do not discover by his malapropisms how futile he is, for their ears are accustomed to this misplacing of terms; which, indeed, is not uncommon among people of stronger native sense. Even the spelling-book and primer are not prophylactic against this failing, which seems to be owing to cerebral inability to keep words from gadding about with each other after they have once entered the mind: a laxness between notions and memory which results in verbal hybridity, as when a man, who was well informed enough, used to say, when the castors were passed, that he never took condignments with his food; and the Western lawyer said of a man that he could not tell a story without embezzlements. A suburban resident informed a friend that he lived in the vicissitude of General ——. We can only hope that Dr. Watts would have found it a "beautiful vicissitude." I have heard of a stout, cheerful, and polite Dogberry, who had arrived at the discretion of

fifty years when his parents died. Then, in reply to a friend who was practising condolence upon him, he said, "Yes, I'm a poor orphanless man!" The same person remarked of his nephew, that he hadn't decided on his profession yet, but was preponderating; and arguing against non-resistance with somebody, he said, "Why, sir, if a man should draw a pistol on me, do you think I'd put my life in his jeopardy?" A venerable clergyman, finding an inebriated person in the gutter, said, "My friend, how did you get there?" The man, with a twinkle of jest yet alive in him, replied, "I'm here, *notwithstanding*." This amused the clergyman, who tried to impart it to his family. "And what do you think the man replied to me?" Nobody could guess. "Well, said he to me, Nevertheless!" And there was a worthy old deacon, who, repeating Watts's hymn line for line after his clergyman, said, "Return, ye rancid sinners!" a condition for which Dogberry would say they ought to be condemned into everlasting redemption.

A very impracticable and contentious person was chosen to be a member of a committee. Somebody asked one of the other members, "Well, how did you find Mr. ——, when it came to business?" The reply was, "Oh, full of fight as ever, — a regular *horse de combat*."

When the Boston fire was stopped at the new post-office, a man standing near was heard to say, "I'm glad they've got that fire under headway at last." In all such cases there is a moment supplied during which some sense is pretended, so that many malapropisms

belong to the race of bulls. At other times they contain the effect of a pun. A man who had lately moved into the country, and was planning some new buildings, informed a friend that he had already got a barn in imbroglio.

A friend called my attention to an article in a Bengal (E.I.) newspaper, which advised its readers "not to kill the calf that lays the golden egg." That is, as he remarked, "a happy combination of Æsop and the Prodigal Son."

So that Mrs. Malaprop's "allegory" basks beside all rivers, and is not the "pretty worm of Nilus" alone. Climate and race do not seem to set up distinctions in the universal breed. It skips in all pastures, with aboriginal characters unchanged. One would suppose that the Irish might be content with that happy cross between wit and witlessness which engenders bulls. But they, too, revenge themselves upon English oppressors of Home Rule by miscalling the language which they hate to use. I heard of an Irish domestic, who, descanting upon the manufacture of soft-soap, tried to describe the virtue of potash, saying with the solemnity of a sacrament, "It's con-se-cra-ted lie." What a pity that potash should not be the sole instance of that commodity!

The magistrate asked the tramp what his occupation was. "Plaze y're honor, I am a sort of pedlar, picking up iron and junk in this and the previous towns." This reminds me of an obfuscated person who was feeling around in vain to recover his carpet-bag in the horse-

car, a search which finally enriched our literature when he mumbled, "It's damned seldom where my bag is."

The malapropisms of Shakspeare have a quality that is not strained. They would be so likely to occur that they seem to verify all prosody and syntax, and we sometimes prefer them to the correct word, especially when the mistake brings a faint flavor of wit. Launcelot Gobbo is tempted to run away from his service to Shylock, and says that "the most contagious fiend" bids him pack. When he meets his father, he says, "I will try confusions with him," which is made witty by the scene that follows, in which old Gobbo does not recognize his son. I once heard a fine lady of society generously revive Launcelot's vein when she said, *apropos* of some event, "however incredulous it may appear."

Dogberry has a pondering look and a fribbling emphasis. He rolls the plump phrases over and over like a quid, but ejects them with a kind of strenuous drivel. He makes pauses, as if discriminating the juiciest reflection, but really settles at random, like a pigeon whose brain has been vivisected; so he concludes that, if a man will not stand when he is bid to, he may go; and that, though a thief ought to be arrested, they that touch pitch will be defiled; and that, on the whole, it is better to let him show himself what he is, and steal out of your company.

Thus he attains to the merit of genius when it chips the egg and lets loose the struggling chick of the ordinary mind. He voices the perplexity of the watch, and lends to it the color of concession and sagacious com-

promise. It is exactly what old Verges thought but did not know how to incubate into definite expression. So all the people who sit upon political fences, and find the edge growing inconvenient, welcome the pad which postpones the necessity for a jump to either side.

Dogberry admires and cossets his own authority, but is too timid to enforce it save with poor old Verges, whose mental feebleness is an exact shadow of Dogberry's ; and the latter manages to step upon himself in amusing unconsciousness. "An old man, sir, and his wits are not so blunt, as, God help, I would desire they were." A good old man, sir ; but he will gabble. All men are not alike, alas! So he goes on, dismissing himself, and slamming to the door without observing it.

But when the watch blunders by reason of idiocy into arresting Borachio, who was the agent in the plot against Hero, the innocent Conrade is found in his company, listening to his disclosures. He, too, is carried off and confronted with Dogberry before the whole "dissembly" of constables. Then and there Conrade calls him in set terms an ass.

Dogberry flickers up into a kind of lukewarmness, and does his little to resent it. "Dost thou not suspect my ears ?" "Thou villain, thou art full of piety, as shall be proved." Then his speech seems to be handling a dustpan to gather up his good points with tremulous huffiness : I am a pretty piece of flesh, and know the law, go to ; and a rich fellow, with leases, and two gowns, and every thing handsome about me. He was never called ass before ; for Conrade was probably the first free-

spoken prisoner entirely innocent of malapropisms that he had ever faced. He cannot compose his shallow fluster; for it is as deep as he is, and it even comes splashing into the pathos of the moment when the wrong done to Hero is discovered, who is not yet known to be still living. He wants the man punished who called him ass, not the man who was the slanderer of Hero. Standing round him are noble natures touched with sorrow and remorse; but for him Conrade is "the plaintiff, the offender," who did call him ass. Dead, shamed, ruined Hero, distracted lover, and tender father, retreat into a background upon which he scrawls himself an ass. For the ocean cannot be accommodated in a saucer, and some men should beware lest the spatter of a tear swamp and drown them. Here the comedy of Dogberry's character acquires a touch of humor; for so are we obliged to tolerate in our profoundest moments the trivialities of those who do not know or cannot contain our serious mood.

There is underlying humor in the fact that all this ignorance and inconsequence, this burlesquing of the detective's business, effects what the age and wisdom of Leonato, and the instinct of the lover Claudio, could not; namely, the discovery of Hero's innocence and of the plot to besmirch her chastity in the eyes of her lover. The wise men are taken in and the accident of folly undeceives them. Then it becomes no longer an accident, but the regimen of the world adopts and puts it to a use. Here comedy becomes humorous, because it is shown how the fortunes of the good and prudent are

involved with all the vulgarities of the world, and justice itself, which is nothing if not critical, cannot make up its case without *non sequiturs*.

When a stratagem compels the braggart Parolles in "All's Well that Ends Well" to show the white feather, he says adroitly, "Who cannot be crushed by a plot?" But absence of plot is quite as hostile to our luck, and goodness and beauty provide no immunity against it. Two soldiers, who had been sent to arrest the Duchess de Berri, rigorously searched for her a whole house over to no purpose; then, lighting a fire to warm their fingers, roasted her out from a hiding-place behind the chimney. A Jacobite climbing into the hollow of an oak leaves his garter on a twig to make a silly advertisement of him. Major Andre meets two men who are not looking for him, and convinces them that he is the very man they ought to seek. Dogberry and his men are as apposite as the female toggery which trips up an escaping rebel; and through them Shakspeare delights to apprise us of a world in which knavery may be outwitted by fatuity.

MALVOLIO.

The humor in the play of "Twelfth Night" resides in the contriving to make one vice ridiculous by other vices which are also absurd. Not one of the comic characters, taken separately, provides the peculiar element of humor. It transpires during the impartial

interplay of the silliness of Aguecheek, the drunken techiness of Sir Toby, the spite of Fabian, the mischievousness of Maria, and the immeasurable conceit of Malvolio, who appeared not like a human being, but "as if he were his own statue erected by national subscription." All these vices betray themselves with such an infantile simplicity, and help each other to construct so delightful a plot, that we feel, with the clown, perfectly content to see "foolery walk about the orb like the sun." It is so difficult to discriminate between follies when they protect themselves by being so amusing, that we say with Viola, —

> "I hate ingratitude more in a man,
> Than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness,
> Or any taint of vice, whose strong corruption
> Inhabits our frail blood."

We always have, as she did, some vice which we hate worse than others. The one that is damned is generally the only one which would put us to discomfort to practise. But humor can make for a time only those vices companionable which turn a man into his own worst enemy and raise no tragic threat against the State.

Malvolio, the steward of Olivia's household, is prized by that lady for his grave and punctilious disposition. He discharges his office carefully and in a tone of some superiority, for his mind is above his estate. At some time in his life he has read cultivated books, knows the theory of Pythagoras concerning the transmigration of the soul, but thinks more nobly of the soul and no way

approves that opinion. His gentility, though a little rusted and obsolete, is like a Sunday suit which nobody thinks of rallying. He wears it well, and his mistress cannot afford to treat him exactly as a servant; in fact, she has occasionally dropped good-natured phrases which he has interpreted into a special partiality: for Quixotic conceits can riot about inside of his stiff demeanor. This proneness to fantasy increases the touchiness of a man of reserve. He can never take a joke, and his climate is too inclement to shelter humor. Souls must be at blood-heat, and brains must expand with it like a blossom, before humor will fructify. He wonders how Olivia can tolerate the clown. "I protest," he says, "I take these wise men, that crow so at these set kind of fools, to be no better than the fools' zanies." Olivia hits the difficulty when she replies, "Oh, you are sick of self-love, and taste with a distempered appetite." Perhaps he thinks nobly of the soul because he so profoundly respects his own, and carries it upon stilts over the heads of the servants and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew.

Imagine this saturnine and self-involved man obliged to consort daily with Sir Toby, who brings his hand to the buttery-bar before breakfast, and who hates going to bed "as an unfilled can," unless no more drink is forthcoming; an irascible fellow, too, and all the more tindery because continually dry. He has Sir Andrew Aguecheek for a boon companion, who says of himself that sometimes he has no more wit than a Christian, or than an ordinary man. When he is not in liquor he is

fuddled with inanity, and chirps and skips about, deluding himself with the notion that Olivia will receive his addresses. Sir Toby, to borrow money of him, fosters the notion, and flatters his poor tricks. Then there is that picador of a clown, who plants in Malvolio's thin skin a perfect quickset of barbed quips, and sends him lowering around the mansion which these roisterers have turned into a tavern. The other servant, Fabian, has a grudge against him for interfering with a bear-baiting he was interested in ; for Malvolio was one of those Puritans who frowned upon that sport, as Macaulay said, not because it worried the bear but because it amused the men. The steward was right when he informed this precious set that they were idle, shallow things, and he was not of their element. No doubt he is the best man of the lot. But he interrupts their carousing at midnight in such a sour and lofty way that we are entertained to hear their drunken chaffing, and we call to Maria for another stoup, though they have had too much already ; but a fresh exposition of dryness always sets in when such a virtue as Malvolio's tries to wither us. However, he becomes the object of their animosity, and they work in his distemper to make him ridiculous.

There is no humor in seeing Malvolio fall so easily a prey to their device. When a man becomes the cause of his own mortification, it is simply comic. But the intrigue becomes humorous when his vice shows disgust at theirs, and theirs becomes indignant at his, and they are delighted to see it well ventilated. For so do we

revenge ourselves upon each other, using not our strength which would be tragic, but our weaknesses. Then impartial justice is obliged to smile to see these counterplots of folly further its great plan. What economy it is to have individuals so contrived that they can baffle, mortify, and school each other without importing the constable! We are self-acting arrangements to relieve the universe from tax and keep its hilarity replenished. In this genial manner "the whirligig of time brings in his revenges." Even if we do not lie in wait for each other, the knowledge of mutual frailties gives our whole life a sub-taste of humor; and that leaves respect upon the tongue.

Sebastian says to the clown: "I prithee vent thy folly somewhere else." Mankind makes the clown's answer: "Vent my folly! He has heard that word of some great man, and now applies it to a fool. Vent my folly! I am afraid this great lubberly world will prove a cockney." No fear of that, my "corrupter of words;" so long as perfect discretion is unknown upon the earth, we are all cosmopolites of infirmity and speak the great language of smiles.

But the play does not let Malvolio drop softly on his feet. There is a faint grudge provoked by the ill-tempered quality of his conceit, and Shakspeare indicates this trait of our nature. The clown, who remembers how the steward used to twit Olivia's contentment at his sallies, and to deprecate it in a lofty way, now mimics his phrases and manner to sting him with a last fluttering dart. Malvolio's pride is already too deeply wounded,

for he has indeed been "notoriously abused." There is no relenting in such a man on account of the fun, for that is a crime in the eyes of a Puritan, to be punished for God's sake. His temper acquires sombreness from his belief that total depravity is a good doctrine if you can only live up to it. But when this crime of fun is perpetrated against the anointed self-esteem of the Puritan himself, it is plain he will be revenged on the whole pack of them unless they proceed to make a sop of deference to touch his hurt with, and a pipe out of his own egotism for sounding a truce.

Shakspeare delighted to mark the transition of a virtue to a vice ; that elusive moment, as of a point of passage from one species to another, discovered and put into a flash from the light of humor. Malvolio's grave and self-respecting temperament is an excellence. No decent man thinks meanly of himself, and the indecent ones cannot afford the disparagement. The pretence of it is a warning to us to expect mischief, a notice put up, "This is a private way ; dangerous passing." Whatever gift a man has becomes a divine permission for self-consideration. Modesty is the humanity of a great mind, a vapor which the sun instinctively gathers to make itself tolerable. For instance, the profits of the Globe and Curtain Theatres helped Shakspeare to his orchards and house in Stratford, but his poverty in the matter of conceit furnished and made the New Place habitable. The neighbor gossips did not have his "greatness thrust upon them." Precisely because he was virtuous there were cakes and ale, and his jests, no

doubt, were spicy in the mouth too. This man who travailed in secret with his glorious brood had nothing in his manner to record

> "Those daily, nightly drippings in the dark
> Of the heart's blood."

Macbeth, Hamlet, and Lear were not known to be in town. These mighty shapes, silently content to wait till a world's worship matched them, forbore to bully the villagers. In time whole nations were mustered in, so that his manifold greatness could be met on an equal footing. But their gentle peer left posterity to beat the drum for this service.

But all men pardon that occasional frankness of egotism which is like lifting a window for clear light to pass through, so that we recognize that a commander is in the street.

Now, Malvolio's sobriety, his contempt for guzzling and roaring of catches, his measured deportment, his nice and cleanly ways are commendable results of his self-opinion, and cannot yield any advantage to low fellows for roughing him until the decent pace of his austerity becomes a strut. One of the characters in a late novel says, "When I see people strut enough to be cut up into bantam-cocks, I stand dormant with wonder, and says no more." This tendency of Nature to a peacock is discovered in the very act, at the moment of production, by this lens of a smile with which we arm our eye. Malvolio is like the fanatical England of the Commonwealth, which was flouted and dishonored by the Aguecheeks and Belches of King Charles II., those

inevitable conspirers against immoderate and arrogant sobriety. They are sure to come. "Nay, I'll come," says Fabian, "if I lose a scruple of this sport, let me be boiled to death with melancholy." Yes, the niggard fellow shall "come by some notable shame." Says Sir Toby, "To anger him, we'll have the bear again;" which England did to her heart's content; but the discredit must be shared by the epoch which strove to strut in the sad conceit that gladness was the sin against the Holy Ghost.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA (AJAX).

It is evident that large portions of this play are not by Shakspeare's hand. It was first attributed to him and published in 1608. But there is an entry in Henslowe's Diary, April 7, 1599, of a sum of money lent to "Mr. Dickers and Harey Cheatell, in earneste of their boocke called Troyeles and Creassedaye." This play of Dekker and Chettle was probably the original which Shakspeare adopted in order to improve. Mr. Fleay, however, attributes to Shakspeare a first form of this play as early as 1597. The improvements are as palpable as the original defects. The play did not receive the benefit of a thorough recasting, and was published under Shakspeare's name with large portions of the crude, absurd, and indecent original matter unchanged.

When Troilus says, —

> "Helen must needs be fair,
> When with your blood you daily paint her thus;"

and when Ulysses replies to the complaint of Achilles that his deeds are forgotten, —

"Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
Wherein he puts alms for oblivion;
A great-sized monster of ingratitudes:
Those scraps are good deeds past, which are devour'd
As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
As done. Perseverance, dear my lord,
Keeps honor bright: to have done, is to hang
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail
In monumental mockery. Take the instant way;
For honor travels in a strait so narrow,
Where one but goes abreast; keep then the path,
For emulation hath a thousand sons,
That one by one pursue. If you give way,
Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,
Like to an enter'd tide, they all rush by,
And leave you hindmost.
For time is like a fashionable host,
That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand,
And with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly,
Grasps in the comer: welcome ever smiles,
And farewell goes out sighing," —

we need no help in recognizing the pen of Shakspeare. This is the speech that holds embedded the world's household line,

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

But we should need sore helping to discover a touch of nature's style in the lines of Troilus replying to the question, "Why stay we, then?" —

"To make a recordation to my soul
Of every syllable that here was spoke.
But if I tell how these two did co-act,
Shall I not lie in publishing a truth?
Sith yet there is a credence in my heart,

An esperance so obstinately strong,
That doth invert th' attest of eyes and ears;
As if those organs had deceptious functions,
Created only to calumniate."

In the same fashion, the Prologue seems written by a pen whose feather was in a constant ruffling. It talks of "princes orgulous," a word nowhere used by Shakspeare, and one which he would have rallied: the six gates of Troy have

"Massy staples
And corresponsive and fulfilling bolts."

And Hector well earns the epithet which has sprung from his name when he cries,—

"Stand, stand, thou Greek! thou art a goodly mark:—
No! wilt thou not?—I like thy armor well;
I'll frush it, and unlock the rivets all,
But I'll be master of it. Wilt thou not, beast, abide?
Why then, fly on, I'll hunt thee for thy hide."

Numerous passages like this have the tone which unmistakably remands them to the original play.

But who can help feeling the joyous and tender mood of Shakspeare reproduced by the worshipping lines of Troilus to Cressida?—

"Oh that I thought it could be in a woman
(As, if it can, I will presume in you),
To feed for aye her lamp and flame of love;
To keep her constancy in plight and youth,
Outliving beauty's outward, with a mind
That doth renew swifter than blood decays!
Or, that persuasion could but thus convince me,
That my integrity and truth to you
Might be affronted with the match and weight

Of such a winnow'd purity in love!
How were I then uplifted! but, alas!
I am as true as truth's simplicity,
And simpler than the infancy of truth."

What a pure flame mounts up from each altar of these consecrated lines to show the detestable uncleanness of some scenes which are left over from the original play! When the wanton Cressida sweeps the chaste fire from those altars and leaves them standing cold in his heart, Shakspeare cries, —

"O Cressid!
Let all untruths stand by thy stained name,
And they'll seem glorious."

Some of the sentences spoken by Ulysses have become fixed in the English consciousness; the rings of robust reflection have grown around and appropriated them, so that the material is quotable in every market and is applied to modern conveniences. The famous speech that charges the Greek factions to their neglect of "degree, priority, and place," —

"Oh, when degree is shaked,
Which is the ladder to all high designs,
The enterprise is sick!" —

contains a truth as applicable to a democracy as to that Shakspearian age which reared the defeaters of the Armada, and sent Drake and Hawkins round the world.

What cause, in want of time or other inconvenience, left this uncultivated play to be ascribed to Shakspeare is past conjecture. In many respects it is like the modern burlesque, and may be regarded as a remote

ancestor of the rollicking English fun which brings out the latent absurdities in ancient and mediæval chivalry. There is, for instance, a play called "The Field of the Cloth of Gold," which makes ridiculous the pomp of the courts of Kings Henry VIII. and Francis I., and represents the famous tournament as a tilt upon hobby-horses ending in a milling match with bottle-holders and all the pugilistic cant. There are plenty of blond women who appear to be out of employment at present on purpose to lend a zest to this drollery, and everybody seems to welcome with democratic delight the slur upon obsolete solemnities, and the insinuation that the surviving ones are no more imposing. With all the devices of the modern theatre, such a play manages to be vastly more ludicrous than Troilus and Cressida, but it does not start with such a cutting motive, and it is in the matter of morality simply neutral. But the play attributed to Shakspeare is one prolonged assault upon the foibles and indecencies of greatness, upon the trivial pretexts that mar and vulgarize an epoch of heroism. The period of the Trojan war is borrowed, and the characters of Homer's Iliad, to throw into a salient light what was after all the real occasion of the famous siege. Paris went to Greece, as Troilus says, —

> "And, for an old aunt, whom the Greeks held captive,
> He brought a Grecian queen, whose youth and freshness
> Wrinkles Apollo's, and makes pale the morning.
> Why keep we her? The Grecians keep our aunt.
> Is she worth keeping? why, she is a pearl,
> Whose price hath launch'd above a thousand ships,
> And turn'd crown'd kings to merchants."

Several scholars dissatisfied with this reputed motive of the siege, and of Homer's Iliad, take refuge in a theory of light-worship, and of a conflict between the Orient and the Occident, the Dawn and the Dark, such as no doubt underlies many of the ancient myths whose names bear allusion to such phenomena. These commentators torture the names and incidents of the Iliad to clear it of the stigma of having no motive-power beyond the stealing of a light wife, and a re-delivery of her to a complacent husband who makes no inquiries. Ten years of siege and battle, of domestic broil and murder, of Odyssean adventures by sea and land, that Helen may be transferred, warm from the arms of Priam, back to the condoning embrace of Menelaus! Truly, when the ugly thing stands thus stripped of its Homeric mantle, we hurry to demand that it shall be decently clothed in travesty.

After the Prologue announces that expectation is "tickling skittish spirits on one and other side," the scene soon opens with the indecent Pandarus trifling with the famous epic names, as he taps them lightly with his battledore to keep up his little game, which is to get Troilus thoroughly involved with Cressida: "An her hair were not somewhat darker than Helen's (well, go to), there were no more comparison between the women;" then the puppy says, "I will not dispraise your sister Cassandra's wit." Think of the jaunty go-between thus estimating the terrible prophetess of the Agamemnon, while he is only whetting Troilus's passion for Cressida, and devising means to bring them together.

For this is meant to travesty the rape of Helen, which was the motive of the siege. The play begins by making incontinence a very important business, and thus ridiculous. As Thersites says, "All the argument is a cuckold, and war and lechery confound all."

Subsequently Cressida, at a wink from the Greek Diomedes, passes out of the keeping of her Trojan lover, thus making the politics as light as her love. And the scenes where Pandarus lickerishly plans the assignation, and rallies Cressida afterwards, are so purposely broad that every pretence of sentiment is emptied out of the play; the vulgarity becomes so conspicuous that the fighting itself is infected with it and runs into parody. The reader need only turn to the interjectional soliloquies of Thersites, which supply to every mock-heroic incident a very free translation, to perceive that there was an intention in the co-laborers upon this play to make all such famous court-manners and their quarrels seem ridiculous.

Thersites is Shakspeare himself in a cynic masquerade, that he may watch the whole game and be privy to the monstrous immorality. Achilles hangs back from fighting the Trojans, not in anger at the slight of Agamemnon, but rather because he has a secret understanding with one of Priam's daughters. Instead of maintaining consistent political attitudes, almost everybody is carrying on some private transaction of this kind, and the great heroes scramble like boys in a shower of comfits. Pandarus, the disgraceful old uncle of Cressida, who brought her and Troilus together in the same spirit

which gave Helen to Paris, and back again coolly to her proper husband, is left at the close of the play to bewail the whole bad issue of the Homeric morals: "A goodly medicine for mine aching bones! O world, world, world! Thus is the poor agent despised. O traitors and bawds, how earnestly are you set a' work, and how ill requited!"

In the second scene, the heroes swagger across the stage one by one coming from the field, while Pandarus stands by and talks of each in a way to make of them diminutive patterns of militia colonels. Æneas, Antenor, Hector, Paris: "There's a brave man, niece;" "It does a man's heart good." That's Antenor, "And he's a man good enough;" but where is Troilus? "If he see me, you shall see him nod at me;" but see Hector, and, oh, "What hacks are on his helmet!—there be hacks!" His niece says, "Be those with swords?" "Swords? any thing:—an the devil come to him, it's all one, by God's lid;" but there's Troilus; look, niece, there's a man, "and his helm more hacked than Hector's." "Had I a sister were a Grace, or a daughter a Goddess, he should take his choice. Paris is dirt to him." Eh, Cressid, don't you take? So all these scenes pass with a mischievous innuendo pushed forward by the lackey sentences: "I warrant, Helen, to change, would give an eye to boot." Thus it runs on like a nautical melodrama, or the rattling chaff of "Tom and Jerry," a stream on which the moral disgust of Thersites swims in full view.

When Ajax appears, we are made aware in the first

place, that he does not know his letters. He flies into a rage with Thersites because he refuses to read to him the proclamation of Hector's challenge, and they fling the vilest Billingsgate at each other, varied with fisticuffs. They try to outdo each other at a game of epithets. If one says, "Thou mongrel, beef-witted lord," the other says, "Toad-stool." "Porcupine," says one in a way to wither. "Scurvy-valiant ass," retorts the other. So in a later scene these phrases of invective remind us of Shakspeare: "Damnable box of envy;" "thou full dish of fool;" "thou idle, immaterial skein of sleeve silk;" "green sarcenet flap for a sore eye." This, flung at Patroclus, convinces us that the plain of Troy has shrunken to a dog-pit, and we give odds on Thersites. "To be a mule, a cat, a lizard, an owl, or a herring without a roe, I would not care; but to be Menelaus, — I would conspire against destiny. I care not to be the louse of a lazar, so I were not Menelaus."

There is a long scene in which the prominent Trojans discuss the policy of returning Helen and getting entirely out of the scrape. Hector says, "Let her go, — any ten Trojans' lives are as dear to us as she; she is not worth what she doth cost the holding." This profit-and-loss view of the case is despised by the rest, especially by Troilus, who is the only consistent person in the play, and who is nobly contrived to keep alive for us the tradition of honor and manhood. Now Cassandra enters to bully like a fish-woman, with arms akimbo:

"Our fire-brand brother, Paris, burns us all.
Cry, Trojans, cry! A Helen, and a woe:
Cry, cry! Troy burns, or else let Helen go."

Troilus flatly says that she is mad. Finally, Hector, though confessing that by every moral law Helen ought to be restored to her husband, thinks it better to hold on to her because she is a spur to valor, and their reputations depend upon preventing the Greeks from carrying their point. It is a discussion of shopkeepers who are aspiring to be actors and couch their speech in high-stepping hexameters.

Pandarus sings to Helen such a bit of frippery that we expect to see them both begin to hop from one foot to the other in the style of the burlesque, as they deliver the chorus of "Oh! oh! ha! ha! hey ho!"

There never was such deliberate absurdity as the fighting in this play. The original draught of it was certainly left untouched by Shakspeare, probably to keep the laugh sustained. It is all done in the vein of Bombastes. "Now, they are clapper-clawing one another," says Thersites; "I'll go look on." Diomedes enters, followed by Troilus, who bids him stand; for, if he took to the river Styx, Troilus would jump in after him. "Stand, forsooth," says Diomedes; "don't flatter yourself I was flying: no, my worthy Trojan, I was only extricating myself from the multitude to get at you, — so come on." They come on, and go off fighting. Pretty soon Diomedes enters with the horse of Troilus, under the pantomimic illusion that he has slain its master. He despatches the horse with a note to

Cressida, his new mistress, late the mistress of the late Troilus. But Troilus was no more dead than Falstaff was embowelled ; he enters in a fine fume, looking up his horse. There is Ajax bellowing to come to close quarters with him, and Diomedes in the rear bawling in imitation of Ajax, but ironically, because he thinks that Troilus fell by his hand. It is a very unexpected accommodation when Troilus appears, and the three go out fighting. Not a drop of blood is spilt as yet, for these are pasteboard warriors with wind for blood. But now comes Hector meeting Achilles, who goes into a perilous bluster as if the Trojan's last moments had arrived in his person. "Have at thee, Hector." "Very well," says Hector, "why don't you begin?" "Well, no, on the whole, I won't," replies Achilles ; "my arms are out of practice, luckily for you ; you may go unscathed this time." No sooner has Hector gone, than Achilles slips off to collect a party of his Myrmidons whom he engages to waylay Hector and overcome him by force of numbers. They find him resting with his helmet off, and they butcher him ; Achilles crying, "Here he is, that's your man!" Then a retreat is sounded on both sides, as if for fear that some one would get hurt. The whole play breaks up abruptly, and nothing is finished. It seems like a tale told by an idiot, "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." The sincere lover, Troilus, meeting Pandarus somewhere amid these punchinello combats, invokes ignominy and shame upon the pander's life, and invites posterity to use his name as a designation of a vile profession. Thus we return upon the

track of the play's motive, and feel competent to enjoy, without hindrance, the humor and irony which saturate the scenes. Let us notice the character of Ajax, which is scratched all over by Shakspeare's pen.

From Malvolio and Dogberry to the famous Ajax may seem a stride fit only for such a blundering giant to contemplate; but the apparent distance is due to the quantity of Ajax, and not to any distinction in his quality. Malvolio's conceit is Turveydropian and runs to deportment. Even when he grows flighty with the fancy of being Olivia's husband, he still meditates what his great air must be. "I will be point-de-vice the very man: to have the humor of state, and after a demure travel of regard, to ask for my kinsman, Toby. I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my familiar smile with an austere regard of control." Standing thus posed, if he should undertake to bow, Toby might believe he "saw creases come into the whites of his eyes."

Dogberry's consequence affects inconsequential phrases, and his days on earth are a series of *non-sequiturs*. Ajax has quite as good an opinion of himself as both these worthies, yet he says he knows not what pride is. "Why should a man be proud? How doth pride grow? I do hate a proud man as I hate the engendering of toads." "Yet he loves himself," says Nestor. Ulysses and Nestor avail themselves of his monstrous sense of superiority to flatter him into fighting Hector in the place of Achilles. This is to pique Achilles and break up his lethargy. Ajax is "a man

into whom Nature hath so crowded humors, that his valor is crushed into folly." He sulks in his tent because he feels as valorous as Achilles, and must therefore sport the Achillean moods. He despises the strategy of Ulysses, calls it closet-war, because his own *forte* is nothing but giving and taking knocks, and his want of thought feels superior to all thinking. You have to behave very gingerly with such a person; if your deference once turns its back, the offence is mortal, and you may make your will. And these people are outrageously touchy; before you have time to make all snug, their conceit has assumed a vortical movement threatening to suck up into its spout every thing in the way. Fire shots at it if you please, but they will not make it tumble. Your only tact is to tack and give it a wide berth. So we see that when Ajax fails to attract any notice he becomes abusive and violent; and he is constantly trying to get somebody to concede that he is a man of as pretty parts as any other Greek. Achilles, forsooth! Who set him up to feel so big, and a better man than I? "If I go to him, with my armed fist I'll pash him o'er the face." "Oh, no, you shall not go." "An a' be proud with me, I'll pheeze his pride." Of course, for of all our pretexts for hating each other there is none so apt as our mutual conceits. We can pardon villainy sooner, for that only affronts an abstract conscience. But a man's conceit is the particular cherished bunion for another man's foot to inadvertently outrage. A straight blow in the chest, hit out from the shoulder, is a signal to measure your strength with another man.

But to measure your weakness with him makes you wince. How adroitly Ulysses "rubs the vein" of Ajax's pride! As soon as the first ripple of Ulysses's blarney reaches his feet, he begins to float like a bladder of rapture, and goes bobbing enormously into the net they have spread for him.

When the plot begins to affect him, Thersites observes that "he goes up and down the field asking for himself." As Douglas Jerrold would say: "He stalks as though Colossus had quitted Rhodes to head a company." "He must fight singly to-morrow with Hector, and is so prophetically proud of an heroical cudgelling, that he raves in saying nothing." Then he describes him as a veritable Malvolio in armor. Is he really in Olivia's garden, with Sir Toby and the rest on the watch? "Why, he stalks up and down like a peacock; a stride, and a stand; ruminates like an hostess that hath no arithmetic but her brain to set down her reckoning; bites his lip with a politic regard,* as who should say, 'There were wit in this head, an't would out.' The man's undone for ever; for if Hector break not his neck in the combat, he'll break't himself in vain-glory. He knows not me. I said, 'Good morrow, Ajax;' and he replies, 'Thanks, Agamemnon.' What think you of this man that takes me for the general? He's grown a very land-fish, lan-

* A clear trace of Shakspeare. Malvolio says, "A demure travel of regard," when he imagines the state-humor he will put on; and when he will send for Toby he expects to quench his familiar smile "with an austere regard of control." The "Twelfth Night" was first acted in February, 1602.

guageless, a monster. A plague of opinion! a man may wear it on both sides, like a leather jerkin."

Thersites does not allude to opinions which may be turned as easily as a jacket, but to the opinionative temper; nothing turns us so neatly inside out as our good opinion of ourselves. Shakspeare uses the word "opinion" occasionally in this sense; as in 1 Henry IV. iii. 1, where Worcester criticises Hotspur's disposition:—

> "Defect of manners, want of government,
> Pride, haughtiness, opinion, and disdain."

So, whether in armor, in a swallow-tail, or in a surplice, our peacock vein expands around the world.

Then Thersites proposes to imitate the austere conceit of Ajax: "Let Patroclus make his demands to me, you shall see the pageant of Ajax." This is done, and the freezing brevity of Thersites is exactly like Malvolio's in the height of his fantasy, when Sir Toby and the rest offer to converse with him.

BOTTOM.

When Malvolio is trying to break up the midnight revel, the mischievous Maria fleers at him with, "Go shake your ears." That is a performance for which Malvolio is still too distant from his congener. But self-sufficiency succeeds in preserving that structure in Bottom, who is so deep and rich with harmless vanity that he sprouts into the auricular appendages, and he shakes them in the most amiable, frisky way through

the Dream of a Midsummer Night. But there is nothing sour about Bottom ; he has none of the quality which Margaret Fuller was the first to call "aloofness." He is hale-fellow with all his mates who appreciate the small gifts which belong to him, and which he good-naturedly strives to render serviceable. Though he is a better fellow than Malvolio, he has all that precisian's ambition ; for as the steward could be Olivia's husband as well as any other man, — forsooth, why not ? — so Bottom thinks he can play all the parts, rises to their glittering bait, and would appropriate the whole interlude. He is one of those self-made men who occasionally discredit their own bringing up and help us to recover our respect for a liberal education. Like the man of whom Sydney Smith said that he was ready at any moment to undertake the command of the Channel Fleet or run a factory, they have elbowed their way into a conviction that they can fill all the offices from constable to President in a style to astonish men of disciplined intelligence. And they frequently succeed in doing that. Men who unfortunately enjoyed early advantages, and whose lives have perhaps been a protracted training in the virtue as well as wit which lifts state-craft above gambling, have the proper kind of admiration for these chevaliers of industry.

But a highly successful deficiency of education does not make Bottom arrogant. As Athenian dicast, foreman of an English jury, republican officer under investigation, his suavity would be unimpeachable. He is

good-tempered, and the first tap of flattery cracks his whole pretension; so that the crafty Quince manages to cast him for Pyramus, who was just such another sweet-faced and destructive lady's man.

Dogberry's malapropisms are inflations made by his vanity to float him into an appearance of sagacity, donkeys' hides blown up to take him across the stream of intercourse. But Bottom miscalls his words from sheer rusticity, and not from any effort to borrow the language of his superiors. The word "alleviate" which he has sometimes heard has been dribbling from brain-cell to cell, and so struggles unconsciously into "aggravate" at last. He uses genteel words which have stayed out of town so long as to be countrified; he has not picked them up, but they have blown into his mind and lodged there, like mallow-seeds. So we see that he is in most senses a born natural, proprietor by birth of the crest which at last he wears. But he is not all fool, for when he wakes out of his exposition of sleep and says he has had a dream, we notice that he is reluctant to expound it. He begins, "Methought I was," — but a feeling of self-respect interrupts him; he tries it again, to say if he can that he had been wearing asses' ears, but his lips refuse that indignity and he gives it up, much to Shakspeare's credit.

A student of Shakspeare often finds himself wandering waterless and foodless in the sage-brush of æsthetic criticism. Heraud, in his book entitled "Shakspeare, his Inner Life," suggests that when Bottom "transmogrified" the text, "The eye of man hath not seen," &c., so

that the new gospel according to Bottom ran thus, "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste," &c., Shakspeare intended to imply that the changing and translating of Bottom shadowed forth the manner in which we shall be transformed in the future life; "but to have done this directly would have been undramatic and otherwise objectionable." This affronts and takes advantage of Bottom's want of intelligence, who might well caution the critic: "Monsieur Cobweb! good Monsieur, get your weapons in your hand, and kill me a red-hipped humble-bee on the top of a thistle; and, good Monsieur, bring me the honey-bag. And, good Monsieur, have a care the honey-bag break not: I would be loath to have you overflown with a honey-bag." But this surfeiting freshet of the modern revival spreads all over Shakspeare's meadows of daisies and forget-me-nots.

Heraud's notion spoils the humor of Bottom's snarl of words which represents perplexity so profound that it must recur to Scripture for relief in expression.

I must notice here another pragmatic after-thought, although it has no connection with the character of Bottom. Heraud is so bent upon forcing a conscious Protestant motive upon Shakspeare that he spoils one of the best passages in the play of Cymbeline. When Imogen, in consequence of a note brought to her from her husband, Leonatus Posthumus, goes to Milford Haven with Pisanio, whom the husband has commissioned to kill her for supposed adultery, she first learns

the object of the journey: this converts the beguiling note into something false, unlike her husband, inexplicable. She has thrust it into her bosom: there it lies. "Come, here's my heart," as she invites Pisanio to perform his duty. Then her hand comes into contact with the paper which she had put there. It shall not stand in the way: "The scriptures of the loyal Leonatus all turned to heresy?" That is, she has put the note in a place where it might divert the stroke which the spirit of the note intended: —

> "Away, away,
> Corrupters of my faith! You shall no more
> Be stomachers to my heart!"

The constant and innocent wife disdains even the slight chance that a bit of paper might turn or deaden the stroke despatched by a loyal husband. She is as loyal as he, but he knows it not: so it is better to die at once than live on thus misconceived. For what is life without the confidence of a loyal husband? The canon against self-slaughter is so divinely engraven in the conscience that it suspends her own hand. Therefore, since life is no longer of value and interest to her, let Pisanio finish. This is the drift of Imogen's speech.

But Heraud imputes to Shakspeare a theological motive in the use of the word "scriptures," as if he meant to include, by secondary allusion, the Bible; and he adds that Shakspeare, although "a critical reader of the Bible and an extreme Protestant," felt the danger of letting the Reformation lapse, by the abuse of reason, into heresies, the only preventive of which was the

Catholic principle of authority watching over the use of the Bible.

The German commentators of Shakspeare have done some magnificent work, open occasionally to the English charge of over-subtlety. But no German can yet vie with this English straining to impute to the text an unnatural and ponderous motive. Bottom said that he could "see a voice," and went to the chink to spy if he could hear his Thisbe's face. But these modern observations are far more preternatural.

All the scenes of the "Midsummer Night's Dream," which depend upon the desire of the Athenian mechanicals to amuse their prince, are merely comical when taken alone. The characters thus constructed, by passing into the serious portions of the play, infect it with the element of humor; for the simple earnestness of all their clownishness fraternizes in no offensive way with the more poetical moods of high society, and we feel the charm that equalizes all mankind. The pomp of a court is concentrated at a fustian play that is poorly propertied with bush, lantern, and a fellow daubed with lime. Simpleness and duty tender this contrast, and it comes not amiss. Their crude parody of the fate of Pyramus and Thisbe, done in perfect good faith, is a claim that humble love may have its fortunes too, as well as that of the proud and over-conscious dames who have been roaming through the woods, sick with fancies. What a delightful raillery it is! Yes, we take the point: "The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them."

It is also a suggestion of the subtlest humor when Titania summons her fairies to wait upon Bottom; for the fact is that the soul's airy and nimble fancies are constantly detailed to serve the donkeyism of this world. "Be kind and courteous to this gentleman." Divine gifts stick musk-roses in his sleek, smooth head. The world is a peg that keeps all spiritual being tethered. John Watt agonizes to teach this *vis inertiæ* to drag itself by the car-load; Palissy starves for twenty years to enamel its platter; Franklin charms its house against thunder; Raphael contributes halos to glorify its ignorance of divinity; all the poets gather for its beguilement, hop in its walk and gambol before it, scratch its head, bring honey-bags, and light its farthing dip at glow-worms' eyes. Bottom's want of insight is circled round by fulness of insight, his clumsiness by dexterity. In matter of eating, he really prefers provender: "good hay, sweet hay, hath no fellow." But how shrewdly Bottom manages this holding of genius to his service! He knows how to send it to be oriented with the blossoms and the sweets, giving it the characteristic counsel not to fret itself too much in the action.

You see there is nothing sour and cynical about Bottom. His daily peck of oats, with plenty of munching-time, travels to the black cell where the drop of gall gets secreted into the ink of starving thinkers, and sings content to it on oaten straw. Bottom, full-ballasted, haltered to a brown-stone-fronted crib, with digestion always waiting upon appetite, tosses a tester to Shakspeare, who might, if the tradition be true, have held his

horse in the purlieus of the Curtain or Rose Theatre: perhaps he sublet the holding while he slipped in to show Bottom how he is a deadly earnest fool; and the boxes crow and clap their unconsciousness of being put into the poet's celestial stocks. All this time Shakspeare is divinely restrained from bitterness by the serenity which overlooks a scene. If, like the ostrich, he had been only the largest of the birds which do not fly, he might have wrangled for his rations of ten-penny nails and leather, established perennial indigestion in literature, and furnished plumes to jackdaws. But he flew closest to the sun, and competed with the dawn for a first taste of its sweet and fresh impartiality.

The humor in this play meddles even with love; for that, too, must be the sport of circumstance and superior power, yet always continue to be the deepest motive of mankind. The juice of love's flower dropped on the eyelids of these distempered lovers makes the caprices of passion show and shift; love in idleness becomes love in earnest, as Puck distils the drops of marriage or of mischief. Titania herself is possessed with that common illusion which marries gracious qualities to absurd companionship. Says Puck, —

> "Those things do best please me
> That befall preposterously."

But this is fleeting. Shakspeare soon breaks the spell in which some of his most delicate and sprightly verses have revelled. The whole play expresses humor on a revel, and brings into one human feeling the supernature, the caprice and gross mischance, the serious drift of life.

TOUCHSTONE.

When we pass from Jaques to Touchstone in "As You Like It," we have expelled that bitter drop which infused sadness into our vein, and the pulse resumes its hilarity. Jaques was not so well-tempered as the female celebrity of our day, who made it a rule, she said, when she heard any scandal of a friend, to hope for the best and believe the worst. Touchstone agrees substantially with Jaques in his views about court-fashions and social conventions, and says things quite as sharp; but he has the tone of genuine humor, and its good-nature never deserts him except when his legs do, as he takes that dispiriting journey into the forest of Arden. We should say that, for a man of his breeding, the clownish and ill-favored Audrey would overcome the most redoubtable temper; for we half believe with Jaques that his "loving voyage is but for two months victualled:" but he has no cynical suspicion. When he sees the sentimental plight of Rosalind, he merrily parodies it, and imagines an old flirtation of his with one Jane Smile; pretending to recollect that he wooed a peascod instead of her in her absence, from which he "took two cods, and, giving her them again, said with weeping tears, 'Wear these for my sake.'" Then he sums it all up with the tolerant reflection, "We, that are true lovers, run into strange capers; but as all is mortal in nature, so is all nature in

love mortal in folly:" that is, Nature can be foolish in love, but the folly is mortal as all the things of Nature are, and will pass away leaving love behind. Therefore he'll have no jibes about it; and Rosalind justly replies, "Thou speak'st wiser than thou art 'ware of." In his quick answer to this, we detect the purpose of Shakspeare to keep the character ignorant of its own *naïveté:* "Nay, I shall ne'er be 'ware of mine own wit, till I break my shins against it." For humor is not so studiedly conscious of its own quality as irony and satire are. Jaques, meeting Orlando over ears deep in love, says ill-natured things to him, and invites him to a game of railing "against our mistress the world, and all our misery." The difference between his wit and Touchstone's is subtly indicated throughout the play, and is one of Shakspeare's most admirable studies in nature. Jaques marks the moment when the virtue of complete knowledge of the world passes into the vice of discontent. Touchstone expresses the gladness of being a member of this inevitable world, and of tolerating himself with the other fools. Thus all his strictures upon society have this superiority, that they cannot be suspected of hypocrisy and ill-will. Nothing is so depressing as the cynic's perpetual strain of undervaluing. It exhausts the heart like an air-bell; the feather of his irony no longer floats, but drops like lead to weigh us down with suspecting ourselves, and so dragging by that mood all the other people into a pitiful depreciation. We grow light again and rise buoyantly to the sunshiny surface when Touchstone implicates us so

good-humoredly in unwisdom, counting himself in, not to miss his taste of the impartiality we all require.

As his name indicates, he tests with a touch the metal of society, and shows dispassionately the color of spuriousness. His foolishness is his naturalness. He is a born simpleton in the sense of being unworldly, a fool "by heavenly compulsion." So he is continually in a state of organic contrast to conventionality. He hears the wrestling-match described, in which three men had their ribs broken. "What is the sport, monsieur, that the ladies have lost?" "Why, this that I speak of." "Thus men may grow wiser every day! It is the first time that ever I heard breaking of ribs was sport for ladies." The people in the fashion are the real wearers of motley, as Celia says: "Since the little wit that fools have was silenced, the little foolery that wise men have makes a great show." Touchstone is

> "Wise enough to play the fool;
> And, to do that well, craves a kind of wit;
> He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
> The quality of persons, and the time;
> Not, like the haggard, check at every feather
> That comes before his eye. This is a practice
> As full of labor as a wise man's art."

In these lines, Shakspeare provides us with the pass-key to the purpose of his court fools and clowns. In them the world's confidential moments speak, when it is off its guard or has no motive to dissimulate. And it is a benefit if men can discover their folly by having it wisely shown to them.

> "The wise man's folly is anatomiz'd
> Even by the squandering glances of the fool."

Jaques accosts him in the forest, "Good-morrow, fool." Touchstone replies, "Call me not fool, till Heaven hath sent me fortune." For thus, indeed, like the wise men, he will have a social chance to show, as they do, what his folly is. Jaques relates how he heard Touchstone airing the solemn triviality of well-ordered circles. Taking out his dial, —

> "Thus may we see, quoth he, how the world wags ;
> 'Tis but an hour ago, since it was nine ;
> And, after one hour more, 'twill be eleven ;
> And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,
> And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot,
> And thereby hangs a tale."

What tale? Why, the everlasting tedious one of over-accredited common-place behavior. Only a Touchstone, with his sly appreciation, can lend any liveliness to that. No wonder Jaques exclaims, "Motley's the only wear." He sees that Touchstone "hath strange places crammed with observation," and is a man after his own mind. If the temper of Jaques only could have been invested in that motley, they that would be most galled with his folly, "they most must laugh." He is delighted to find that fools can be "so deep contemplative." The deepness of it rests on Touchstone's appreciation of the average shallowness, but there is nothing in his tone to stir that up to a feeble sputter of resentment Something in the tone continually appeals to us, as he did to Audrey: "Doth my simple feature content you?" Yes, there is nothing scurrilous in thee, else thou hadst not taken up so comfortably with Audrey,

who cannot even wish that the gods had made her poetical. "Who calls?" says Corin. "Your betters, sir," replies Touchstone; for everybody is superior to somebody.

What a fine pretence he makes that good manners are essential to salvation, when he asks Corin, "Wast ever in court, shepherd?" Never at court! "Then thy manners must be wicked; and wickedness is sin, and sin is damnation." See the mock Grundy lift his hands, and cast upward the look of shocked superiority. It is done well enough to serve our social virtuosity for a whole epoch of its disdain.

And mark what good sense the fellow has; for, knowing that Audrey cannot appreciate his parts, he says: "When a man's verses cannot be understood, nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child, understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room. Truly, I would the gods had made thee poetical." Audrey replies: "I do not know what poetical is. Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?" Honest and true! We see what has won the heart of this motley disparager of cant and shams.

We see it too in the scene where he brings his wife into the Duke's company, with such an air of self-possession mixed with a pleased sense that she is his best joke at the punctilio of fashionable life. "An ill-favored thing, sir, but mine own; a poor humor of mine, sir, to take that that no man else will." Not so poor a humor; for humor itself does that, and adopts into the human

family the outcasts who come between the wind and our nobility. "Rich honesty dwells like a miser, sir, in a poor house; as your pearl in your foul oyster." Then he amuses the Duke with a strain that runs into irony, because it has the semblance of being seriously meant, upon some other esteemed punctilios of the code of honor: he rallies the whole nicely graded scale of customs from the retort courteous to the lie direct, and nominates in order the degrees of the lie. But you may avoid even the lie direct with an *If*. "If you said so, then I said so." How many a quarrel on the platform and in the parlor has been stifled by this bolster of an *If*, and the parties quietly subside into a profounder dislike.

The kind of marriages which the French call *de convenance* get a wholesome rebuke from him; and the vulgarity of its terms is not wanton but highly apposite, as it is a part of the intended satire. It strips the matrimonial arrangement of its rhetoric, when he tells the shepherd that it is another simple sin in him to bring the incompatible members of his flock together, "out of all reasonable match. If thou be'st not damned for this, the devil himself will have no shepherds." He really imparts to you the surmise that the *mariages de convenance* were appropriately derived by natural selection from the animal world.

In fine, the Duke characterizes Touchstone well when he says, "He uses his folly like a stalking-horse; and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit." So hunters, who are seriously concerned to obtain food,

work along towards their game behind a mimicry of it. And such a hunter for the soul of goodness, stalking it underneath the obvious beguilement, is the Humor of Shakspeare: —

"In good earnest, and so God mend me."

FALSTAFF:

HIS COMPANIONS; AMERICANISMS.

FALSTAFF.

THE political interest of the reigns of Henry IV. and V. is divided by the huge bulk of Falstaff, who lightly buffets the tide and emerges with invincible gayety as often as the tragedy closes around him. His wake draws after it a number of disreputable or silly fellows, whom his audacious humor alone prevails upon the tragedy to tolerate. The job of turning them out would include the dismissal of the unbounded man in whom they move and have their being; and the gravity of the political situation is engrossed enough to hold its own ground against them, to prevent a freshet of comedy from washing off its state. They seem to have been the traits of Falstaff which were left over in the making up of his personality; and, this attaining at length to such a circumference that no more matter could be comprised, the surplus revolved as satellites. There is Bardolph who says that Sir John is "out of all compass, out of all reasonable compass;" but he himself is the inflammation which all the monstrous quantity of sack could not suffuse Sir John with, who burns by proxy in his nose. He is the red mark for Falstaff's raillery, but liquor and lodgings keep him companionable, so that, when at last "the fuel is gone that maintained that fire," he has a tear or two, not yet evaporated, to help the obsequies of his master. There is Pistol, a great haunter of play-houses, where he has

picked up phrases of bombast, such as swarmed in the bad tragedies of the period; when the sack has reached his head it sets them all afloat, to ruffle the company:

> "Shall packhorses,
> And hollow-pamper'd jades of Asia,
> Which cannot go but thirty miles a day,
> Compare with Cæsars, and with Cannibals,
> And Trojan Greeks? nay, rather damn them with
> King Cerberus; and let the welkin roar."

Pistol's love for alliteration puts a *c* for an *h* in the third line, and turns the Carthaginian into a Carib.

Falstaff is cowardly from policy, and reasons himself into the belief that honor is a paltry motive for the risk of sustaining knocks. What was left over of this pusillanimity appears unadulterated in Pistol, who snatches up his sword, calls upon death to rock him asleep and abridge his doleful days; but he is a tame cheater, "you may stroke him as gently as a puppy greyhound." If a hen turns back her feathers he is off, to disappear from history with his mouth full of the Welshman's leek. There is Mistress Quickly who caters for Falstaff's vices, endures his swindling till almost all her goods have gone to the pawnbroker's, and then admires to be cajoled back into more lending, dismisses the suit which she brought with such strenuous and voluble feebleness, and hopes he will come to supper. She tells a story as any Yankee Cousin Sally would, dwelling upon insignificant accessories and recurring to them to give the memory a fresh start, till the narrative becomes nothing but mnemonics. "It was no longer ago than Wednesday last, — Neighbor Quickly, says he, — Mas-

ter Dumb, our minister, was by then, — Neighbor Quickly, says he, receive those that are civil; for, saith he, you are in an ill-name; — now, he said so, I can tell whereupon."

It is plain that the Down-East style of narrative emigrated with Popham, and effected the settlement which he failed to do. A trivial mind is a haunt for petty details, where they are fondled and fed, so that they become too familiar, and keep tripping up the story-teller who vainly tries to strike a direct path, and for want of point arrives nowhere.

"Thou didst swear to me upon a parcel-gilt goblet, sitting in my Dolphin-chamber, at the round table, by a sea-coal fire, upon Wednesday in Whitsun-week, when the Prince broke thy head for liking his father to a singing-man of Windsor: thou didst swear to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me, and make me my lady thy wife. Canst thou deny it? Did not goodwife Keech, the butcher's wife, come in then, and call me gossip Quickly? coming in to borrow a mess of vinegar; telling us she had a good dish of prawns, whereby thou didst desire to eat some, whereby I told thee they were ill for a green wound." But she, too, is won into a kind of fidelity by the charms of Sir John's manner; and, when he falls sick unto his death, she cannot forget some genial hours. "Ah, poor heart! he is so shaked of a burning quotidian tertian, that it is most lamentable to behold. Sweet men, come to him."

The brain of Justice Shallow smoulders with the brag of his youth; and, when he delightedly blows it up, he

has the impression that he was redoubtable for performance. The visit of such a solid, whole-souled profligate as Falstaff is a rare chance for him to prate of the wildness of his youth, "and every third word a lie." "Lord, lord, how subject we old men are to this vice of lying!" He makes paralytic efforts to fraternize with Falstaff's wickedness, poking sly innuendoes at his immeasurable superiority in that line. Falstaff remembers that he "came ever in the rear-ward of the fashion." He has settled down into comfortable living; and his leanness is smug with all the details of it, — the pigeons, and the russets, the mutton, "and any pretty little tiny kickshaws." "Oh, the mad days that I have spent! and to see how many of my old acquaintance are dead. — How a good yoke of bullocks? Is old Double dead? — How a score of ewes now?" So earnest with his petty thrift that death is but a formality. The feeble ripple of his talk over a bed of commonplaces would soon tire out the livelier Sir John, if he did not see money to borrow and good fat quarters to cultivate. So this man, "made after supper of a cheese-paring," has the flimsiest of butterfly-nets thrown over him, and is caught without damage.

There is little to say of Poins, save that he helps the Prince to play the fool with the time, while the spirits of the wise mock them. Now and then he reminds the Prince that his father is lying sick while he trifles so. Then the Prince gives us glimpses of the temper which separates at last from Falstaff, when the crown pushes the fool's cap from his head. "Thou think'st me as far in the devil's book as thou and Falstaff, for obduracy and

persistency: let the end try the man." He is strong enough to enact this episode of folly without letting it tamper with the kingship which is the proper quality of his soul. And Falstaff seems to have transferred to him a portion of his own wit, as if on purpose to be soundly railed at and stimulated to the top of his bent. The only advantage which the Prince has over his fat knight is a commodity of truth-telling; but Falstaff cheapens it by the genius of his escapes.

Corporal Nym will cut a purse and drain a can without winking, as the rest will; but he admires to have a pretence of soldierly bluntness, as when he says, "I dare not fight; but I will wink, and hold out mine iron." He is a man of few words, and has something of Cromwell's enigmatic way of speaking to cover his deliberate intention of doing nothing to end his days. "I cannot tell; things must be as they may. There must be conclusions. Well, I cannot tell, . . . and that's the humor of it." A silent man, but not of the fighting type which helped Queen Elizabeth's adventurers to sack the towns of the Spanish main and defray the expense of her countenance. His rapier is out before his bluster, because the latter has rusted in its sheath. He has a quarrel with Pistol about eight shillings, — not the first, by many a tavern reckoning; and he has an unaffected desire to run him through the body and let out his vaporing.

"Pay!" cries Pistol: I have not sunk so low as that. "Base is the slave that pays." Out come the swords, and you expect "flashing fire will follow." But Pistol has calculated that Bardolph, who is present, will allow

no fighting; so he brandishes up to the very verge of blows, to make Bardolph say, "He that strikes the first stroke, I'll run him up to the hilts, as I am a soldier." Pistol manages to have this threat arrive on the ground just in time to apprehend the parties for a breach of the peace. Nym shoves his sword back with the feigned grumble of a disappointed man: "I will cut thy throat, one time or other, in fair terms; that is the humor of it," — Mrs. Quickly having plighted her troth to him, and Pistol having married her in spite of it.

A man with a great flow of animal spirits is sometimes, especially if he is liable to sudden bursts of this exuberance, mistaken to be under the influence of wine. Falstaff's average rate of mirth is so high that wine refuses to contest it. The blood of his vein can afford to be handicapped against the blood of the grape. The monstrous quantities of sack sink through the porosities of his rotundity, and mildly percolate a subterranean world; so that his abstinence in the article of bread is a very nice instinct that balancing bulk enough exists already.

Falstaff, by every ordinary law of human nature, should be inebriated. His exemption is a kind of atheism. But he prefers to have his own vices overdone in the persons of his companions, all of whom seem to have anticipated the sanitary argument in favor of the use of liquor that an American suggested: "If water will rot a cedar-post, what will it do to the human stomach!" Now Pistol's brain, owing to the rarefaction produced by rhetoric, is an exhausted receiver into which all fluids

rush and qualify him for inebriety. It is sometimes so excessive that the fuller Falstaff has to beat him out of the room. But one can never say that Pistol is disguised in liquor; for when he is the drunkest his exalted style is most conspicuous. He calls for more sack; then, unbuckling his sword, he draws out the Bilbao blade before laying it down, and manglingly spouts off the Spanish motto that is upon it, —

"*Se fortuna me tormenta, il sperare me contenta;*"

calls the weapon his sweetheart, and, when Bardolph tries to turn him out, snatches it up, and seems to sharpen it upon horrid threats:

> "What! shall we have incision? shall we imbrue?
> Why then, let grievous, ghastly, gaping wounds
> Untwine the sisters three! Come, Atropos, I say!"

Fate comes in the person of Falstaff, who declares, "An a' do nothing but speak nothing, a' shall be nothing here;" for Falstaff has the virtue of a keen appreciation of the appositeness of words.

You have your choice to regard these people as whimsical disenchantments of Falstaff by a satirical demon, or to consider Falstaff as an aggregate of these people invested with the illusion of wit. Pistol is the raw article of poltroonery done in fustian instead of a gayly slashed doublet. Bardolph is the capaciousness for sherry without the capacity to make it apprehensive and forgetive: it goes to his head, but, finding no brain there, is provoked to the nose, where it lights a cautionary signal. Nym is the brag stripped of resources, shivering in prosiness. Dame Quickly is the easy vir-

tue in reduced circumstances, dropped out of its fashionable quarter to keep a bar and be a procuress, — all the fine phrases pawned clear down to vulgar gossip.

Thus brawling, boasting, tippling, thieving, silly tricks and waggery come strolling behind Falstaff into the company of kings and nobles, no chamberlain to announce them, no crossed halberts to repel.

The second part of "King Henry IV." opens nobly with the conflicting rumors which travel from the lost field of Shrewsbury, where the flame of rebellion was quenched, towards the castle of the Earl of Northumberland, who hopes to hear that it has prospered. There is nothing insignificant in the characters who have ranged themselves on either side of the great question of their times. Rebellion may be a blunder, but it levies on manhood a tax as heavy as loyalty. So we are admitted to the society of great politicians, full of an idea, who blossom on the top of their epoch whence the sap that feeds them is derived. They venture life and fortune upon the moment when their tendency opens and exhales. They are impersonations of that quality in the soil of their country which has grown up to them, to claim and put them forth to triumph or suffer with the ideas which are involved. They risk hereditary honor and estate, send their eldest sons and heirs of titles into the field which two political tendencies select to strive for precedence. The whole spirit of the scene is noble and unselfish : lands, luxuries, and quiet are forsworn ; and a preference, be it only of passion, be it a humor of the times mixed of equal parts of honor and vanity, be it

alloyed with disappointments and galled ambitions, is yet virile enough to stake its own aggrandizement rather than let inglorious caution strangle the chance of supremacy. The style is elevated and sincere. Rumors of a conflicting nature, making post-horses of the wind, come like cross-tides to dash the feelings to and fro; now lifting them upon a wave of promise, now letting them drop into the trough of despondency. The decisive drift is soon announced, and the father of Hotspur has to accept the tidings of his son's fate. In vain the sanguine-tempered Lord Bardolph discredits and tries to explain away the news. But his spirit rises to the tide-mark of the disaster:

> "We all, that are engaged to this loss,
> Knew that we ventur'd on such dangerous seas,
> That, if we wrought our life, 'twas ten to one:
> And yet we ventur'd, for the gain propos'd
> Chok'd the respect of likely peril fear'd;
> And, since we are o'erset, venture again.
> Come, we will all put forth, — body, and goods."

It seems as if these high resolves ought to fill the horizon and extrude every thing irrelevant. But not so: something quite as capacious, but fertilized by not one dot of grandeur, comes vaporing on the scene.

Down to a period quite late in the history of literature, the French were unable to understand how we could accept the confusion of moods in Shakspeare's tragedies, and their abrupt introduction into the nobler sentiment of the scene, as comedy races after gravity to overtake and strangle it, and the gravity quite as unexpectedly recurs. This appeared to their æsthetic crit-

icism as an absurd and grotesque wrong done to the unity of impression which a play ought to make by developing and depending upon a single idea, and to this end admitting only the feelings which belong to it.* Without this, no tragedy can have its effect of gravity, but rather, to use Falstaff's quip in parrying the Chief Justice, its effect of gravy, — to leave in the palate a taste of a mixture of sauce and drippings. But Shakspeare runs the coulter of unity deeper than the obvious idea which the plot of his tragedy develops; for it passes at once through soils of diverse elements, driven by a sure but vigorous instinct to turn them all up to the fructifying light. Instead of the unity of a single strand, he weaves all the threads of human nature into the cable which holds our hearts at anchor on his spring-tide.

This rotund earth that goes wallowing eastward is an aboriginal Falstaff, and carries all sorts of humors in its unbounded stomach. It puts off night and slips into the garments of the day not more easily than its vein changes from hour to hour, as the tone of its daylight does, rolling along the whole gamut from gloom to gar-

* But since Voltaire's time, and notably within the present century, the French mind has amply atoned for previous misconceptions, and its tribute to the genius of Shakspeare is rivalling England itself Germany was earlier in this field; but, if France means to annex Shakspeare, she can afford to let Alsace and Lorraine go. The younger Hugo's study of Hamlet; the volumes of Alfred Mézières, of Philaréte Chasles; the studies of Guizot; the admirable article upon Cleopatra by Henri Blaze de Bury, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, June 15, 1872; another, later, in the same review, upon "Medical Psychology in the Dramas of Shakspeare," &c., — show a noble disposition and a thorough sympathy.

ishness. The mood must be very solemn and absorbing to be exempt from the sudden interruption of jollities which may be even ribald in their bearing. If nothing is too cheap for Nature it is precious enough for Shakspeare. Whatever a Creator has permitted to take lodgings in the human breast is not turned out by him ; for he lodges there too, claiming the shelter of the same impartial roof beneath which we have to learn to tolerate each other. So the first impression which his plays make is this complaisance towards the most discrepant moods, just as life has it on the stage of the world ; for he is not so concerned to develop a single motive by nice and consecutive gradations as he is to show the world's swift alternations of all the motives and tempers of mankind. The French complained that the result is like a road built of smooth pavement, corduroy, rutted mud, jarring heaps of cobble-stones ; and that the feeling is transferred without warning along all the discrepancies of this route, to be jolted and racked till self-preservation becomes more absorbing than the landscape. But the structure of the Teutonic mind is well adapted to this journey by its robust manifoldness, sired by a primitive vigor of Nature, that propagates her turbulence, her jest and earnest, her nobleness and indecorum, the infinite variety which age cannot dim nor custom stale, the instincts of her animals and the intuitions of her men. Above all, the races which appreciate the deeper unity of Shakspeare, and bear without discontent its fusion of elements which seem to have only harsh antipathies, have drawn from Nature the

mental quality of humor, and that is a flux which no substances can withstand. Nothing is uncouth or recluse enough to stay outside of its reconcilement.

So while Northumberland's castle is agitated by the news of disaster, and the slain Percy is expected home by the halls he never shall inherit, Falstaff appears, with that diminutive page who was Christian when the Prince gave him, "and look, if the fat villain have not transformed him ape." We were pitying Northumberland, as in grief and anger he threw away his crutch, tore the "sickly quoif" from the head which princes aimed to hit, and called for iron to encase his forehead. What does this fat man here, jeering at his page for being smaller than he, and asking what Master Dumbleton said about the satin for his short cloak and slops? It must have been a mistake of some precipitate scene-shifter. No: there be peers of the realm and peerless blackguards; one is in revolt against his king, the other against all decency. But the play has a history which includes them both in its epoch, as Nature includes them; and for her it is but a step from Warkworth, where the old nobleman is weeping, to London, where this tavern-haunter defies fortune with his shifty gibes, and laments nothing but the consumption of his purse. What stimulus can there be for us in his gilded rascality so soon after Harry Percy's spur is cold? Shall we put up with him? We shall have no trouble: Falstaff undertakes to vindicate Nature for setting him in this company, and he does it with such resource and admirable cheerfulness that earldoms seem to have been created to be his foil.

His character belongs to comedy because its vices are of the breed which never contract alliances with great passions. The big frame is so completely inoculated with laughter that his faults cannot take the contagion of tragedy. His wit is an implement which his comic nature uses for purposes of self-defence. He is essentially comic before he opens his mouth: for he is built to brag, and is too fat to be brave; his fleshly propensities are latent with situations for covering him with ridicule; his talent for lying has the peril that it may be used too often. Yet, on the whole, he is of Swift's opinion, that a lie is too good a thing to be wasted. But let the Prince and Poins plot a little, and the Wives of Windsor beguile his loose vein, and the scene quickly runs to his discomfiture. The mountainous knave is caught in a trap which might have been baited for a mouse, so small that we wonder how his wit could have blundered into it. But, being in, his wit behaves so delightfully like virtue that we think he has escaped. "Nothing confutes me but eyes," he says. Only seeing is disbelieving such an embodied stratagem. "By the Lord, I knew ye!" said he to the Prince, after the midnight scare the latter gave him, and goes nigh to convince us that he ran away to avoid killing the heir-apparent. So large a man does not often wriggle so unctuously through such a narrow place. We should have to make his bail bear some correspondence to his bulk, if he lived where swindling was a signal for juries to disagree.

There is a scene where the Prince comes out of his

hiding-place after Falstaff has been abusing him to Doll Tear-street.* "Didst thou hear me?" "Yes; and you knew me, as you did when you ran away by Gad's Hill: you knew I was at your back, and spoke it on purpose to try my patience." How slyly Falstaff avoids putting his foot into this trap; and the Prince underestimated his resources. "No, no, no, not so; I did not know thou wast within hearing. No abuse, Hal, on my honor; no abuse, Ned. I dispraised him before the wicked, that the wicked might not fall in love with him; and thy father is to give me thanks for it." His mind is supple and adaptive, yet all the more comical because the talent is futile for concealment, and only earns for him a laugh which shakes the arm suspended to chastise.

He extemporizes deafness, and does not hear the Chief Justice calling to him. When the attendant comes and plucks him by the elbow to bid him note the Justice, he gains time by inventing the pretext that a beggar has him by the sleeve. "What! a young knave, and beg!" But this resource was by no means invented by Falstaff. This world is an old hand at it; and, whenever the truth of one age summons the error of the past to arrest and judgment, the interested parties start a dodge, and stimulate it with voluble pretence of earnestness, hoping to make it serve their day, at least. When Galileo discovered the satellites of Jupiter, people expected the sky to fall. Something must be done to prop it up. So they said that, even if the satellites could

* Obviously the proper reading. Prince Henry says, "This Doll Tear-street should be some road." First noticed by Coleridge.

be seen through the telescope, the inference that they were really in the sky was not a fair one ; more likely they were something in the telescope itself.

When Scheiner, the Jesuit, discovered solar spots in 1611, he had to communicate the discovery to his Superior. The latter was an Aristotelian. He would not even risk a peep through Scheiner's telescope. He said : "I have read Aristotle's writings from end to end many times, and I have nowhere found in them any thing similar to what you mention. Go, therefore, my son, and endeavor to tranquillize yourself. Be convinced that these appearances, which you take for spots, are the faults of your glasses or of your eyes ; if they are not, as I in part suspect, the result of a disordered imagination." Texts and pretexts are still employed to prevent Theology and Science from coming to close quarters. Science impends and threatens with the majestic facts of the divine order. Theology, driven from pretext to pretext, cries at last, "What ! upon compulsion ? No : if reasons were as plenty as blackberries," nothing on compulsion ! When Falstaff is hurried, he says, "Do you think me a swallow, an arrow, or a bullet ? have I, in my poor and old motion, the expedition of thought ?" That is the trouble with the ponderous old past ; so it turns Falstaff's deaf ear to thought, and imitates his strategy.

He is a good mimic of the style of bluntness and honesty. Pretending to have killed Percy, he cries, "There is Percy : if your father will do me any honor, so ; if not, let him kill the next Percy himself." "Why,"

says the Prince, "Percy I killed myself." "Didst thou? Lord, lord, how is this world given to lying! If I may be believed, so; if not, let them that should reward valor bear the sin upon their own heads." You can hear the same tone to-day wherever shifty impudence pilfers the inventions and exploits of others to furnish with them a house and reputation. This style is comic because it is assumed to cover deceit, but is too scant a pattern after all; and the cloven foot is amusingly unconscious of being in full sight.

Sir John does not intend to be readily put down. In the matter of arrest at Dame Quickly's suit for debt, how airily he gives the Chief Justice tap for tap, and urges that the officers are hindering him from going on the king's errand! He is hard to get fairly cooped in a corner; most invaluable counsel to defend a ring, big enough to break through the most carefully woven indictment. When you think you have him neatly at bay, the bulky culprit floats over your head in a twinkling of resource and is gone: it is done so cleverly that you have not the heart to pursue him farther, or, if you do, it is only for the sake of enjoying an encore of this trapeze-shifting of his wit.

It is comic when his tone of protestation that he will discharge his debt to Dame Quickly succeeds in taking in her who has been so often deceived before. But one weakness is always too strong for another; so he is constantly betrayed into expense by her, and that is at once her vice and its reward. "I owe her money; and whether she be damned for that I know not."

It is also comic that his vanity prevents him from suspecting himself of cowardice and evasion of duty; so that he indulges the most inflated self-appreciation, and no misadventure is sharp enough to prick it. "Embowelled! 'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit." And his fright inspires him with the adage dear ever since to shirkers, "The better part of valor is discretion;" and it has a sensible purport which blinds him to his own disgrace. "There is not a dangerous action," complains he to the Chief Justice, "but I am thrust upon it. Well, I cannot last ever. But it was always yet the trick of our English nation, if they have a good thing, to make it too common. I would to God, my name were not so terrible to the enemy as it is." Does he really think his bullying style is a perpetual action of bravery, or is he delighting to be ironical upon himself?

Now Falstaff's mind has many a talent which liberates it from the grossness of his body. His wit shows a nimble foot of fancy. His common-sense is an acute ally of his cowardice. The imagination which betrays him into the largeness of his lying goes into the felicity of his wit: both are on an ample scale. He rallies Bardolph for his complexion, and overwhelms his ragged company with comparisons, just as his men in buckram grow in number. When his fancy seizes an opportunity he cannot let it go, but unconsciously shifts it into all possible lights, and exhausts invention to make the point emphatic. How many imaginative people there are who unconsciously lie in the same way with their exaggerated raptures at a landscape, their wholesale contribu-

tions to an occurrence! The flavor of stories improves by going to sea upon their bounding fancies. Only give them time enough and a free swing among their friends, and an event of the chimney-corner will become bewitched into a Cinderella at the ball. These people really believe with the imagination instead of with the understanding; and, if conscience is comparatively weak, common-sense is not a sufficient curb to their career.

Falstaff's ragged soldiers have hearts "no bigger than pins' heads." "A mad fellow met me on the way, and told me that I had unloaded all the gibbets, and pressed the dead bodies. There's but a shirt and a half in all my company; and the half-shirt is two napkins tacked together." This fanciful destitution reminds us of an American improvement upon it, attributed to a man the smallest hole in whose shirt was that for the head, so ragged that it had to be washed by the dozen.

All of Falstaff's speeches are one crescendo of phrases; each seems to breed the next one, and they swarm in his fancy like gnats in a broad sun. Bardolph's red features are very tropics to yield spicy railing to him. The ginger of it is hot in the mouth. He never sees that face but he thinks upon hell-fire, and Dives in his purple, burning. He imagines he saw it running up Gad's Hill in the pitchy dark, and took it for an ignis-fatuus. It has saved him a good deal of money in links and torches.

We come upon the same vein in the "Comedy of Errors," where Dromio says, "Marry, sir, she's the kitchen-wench, and all grease; and I know not what use to put

her to, but to make a lamp of her, and run from her by her own light. I warrant her rags, and the tallow in them, will burn a Poland winter: if she lives till doomsday, she'll burn a week longer than the whole world."

Falstaff might have said of himself that "wherever his shadow falls it leaves a grease-spot."

Shakspeare evidently relished these unctuous conceits, for in the "Merry Wives of Windsor," when Falstaff's wooing in the forest is suddenly interrupted, he says, "I think the devil will not have me damned, lest the oil that is in me should set hell on fire; he would never else cross me thus."

There is sometimes in Shakspeare an exaggeration of this kind which has a Titanic grasp to it that throttles laughter just as it meditates escape. The grotesque and humorous element is stunned by a fierce and passionate feeling, such as Dante might have steeped one of the circles of his Inferno in. A specimen of this may be found in "Henry VIII.," where Lord Abergavenny, talking about Wolsey's low-born greatness, says:

> "But I can see his pride
> Peep through each part of him: whence has he that?
> If not from hell, the devil is a niggard;
> Or has given all before, and he begins
> A new hell in himself."

All the followers of Falstaff catch his habit of improving Bardolph's redness. The Page could not distinguish his face through a red lattice, but, at last spying his eyes, thought he had made two holes in a new red petticoat to peep through. And, after Falstaff is dead, a

boy recalls his fanciful notion that a flea sticking upon Bardolph's nose was a black soul burning in hell. A specimen worthy of Falstaff is found in an ancient Greek epigram which celebrates a nose so long that the owner could never hear himself sneeze. But Falstaff's imagination is so prolific that we feel as if a great many of these comments on the text of Bardolph's nose had not come down to us.

But the talent itself has descended; and Falstaff may be regarded as the mighty progenitor of the American knack at exaggerating, into which imagination must enter either to make it witty or simply ludicrous. We can match the felicities of Falstaff from every State of the Union. Indeed, we are of opinion that emigration, which has impaired the physical fulness of the Anglo-Saxon man, has not depleted the vein of his humor: our romancing talent is as vast as the country which nourishes it by all enterprises and ambitions. We have not fallen away vilely; we do not bate, do not dwindle. Mr. Dickens declares that even the national habit of expectoration is on the scale of the country's streams. He is a genuine descendant of Falstaff, and he must have always lived at Gad's Hill, where, at some time or other, he helped the Prince and Poins to rob the fat knight, and outwitted all his accomplices by taking imagination for his best share of the booty. So we are not much surprised to hear him describe a high wind with the amplitude of Falstaff's girth: "The air was for some hours darkened with a shower of black hats, which are supposed to have been blown off the heads of unwary

passengers in remote parts of the town, and have been industriously picked up by the fishermen." When Grip, his raven, falls sick, towards eleven o'clock he was so much worse that "it was found necessary to muffle the stable-knocker."

But we have made improvements in this style of fiction, and almost every newspaper might furnish forth a play. We are told of grass in Colorado that is so short you must lather it before you can mow. We hear of a man who moves about so lazily that when he works in his garden the shade of his hat kills the plants. Another man wakes up in the morning, after a day spent in hunting strawberries, with only one eye, the other being engaged in holding the cheek which had marched over it during the night. It was a case of dog-wood poison. The relatives did not find his mouth until near noon, when it was discovered just back of his left ear, enjoying the shade. There was a man who stood on his head under a pile-driver to have a pair of tight boots driven on. He found himself shortly after in China, perfectly naked and without a cent in his pocket.

There is a man in the West who is so bow-legged that his pantaloons have to be cut out with a circular saw. Apropos of this, a pair of pantaloons which was distributed to one of the sufferers by the forest fires, a few years ago, was found to be ridiculously small. The man's wife wanted to know if there lived and breathed a man who had legs no bigger: if there did, he ought to be taken up for vagrancy as having no visible means of support. It was discussed whether to use them for

gun-cases, or to keep the tongs in. This reminds us that Falstaff said you might have thrust Shallow, "and all his apparel, into an eel-skin; the case of a treble hautboy was a mansion for him, a court."

In the same style of minifying a thing by magnifying its minuteness, he says, "If I were sawed into quantities, I should make four dozen of such bearded hermit's staves as Master Shallow." Then he delights himself with fancying how he will riot over the slim subject and endow it with every imaginable chance for provoking laughter: "I will devise matter enough out of this Shallow to keep Prince Harry in continual laughter, the wearing out of six fashions. Oh, it is much that a lie with a slight oath, and a jest with a sad brow, will do with a fellow that never had the ache in his shoulders! Oh, you shall see him laugh, till his face be like a wet cloak ill laid up!"

A lie with an oath not always slight, "and a jest with a sad brow," is a prophecy of America which Mr. Sumner might have incorporated among his other classic Voices.

The country also supplies specimens of a wild-cat oratory in whose bombast Shakspeare might have recognized an element of his own imagination. I am not certain whether the following is genuine, or possesses only the truth of verisimilitude: "Build a worm-fence around the winter's supply of summer weather; skim the clouds from the sky with a teaspoon; catch a thunder-cloud in a bladder; break a hurricane to harness; ground-sluice an earthquake; lasso an avalanche;

pin a napkin on the crater of an active volcano; but, Mr. Chairman, never expect to see me false to my principles." On the whole, the stress laid upon the "principles" is quite in favor of its American genuineness.

The quality of imagination which creates the humorousness of an exaggeration can also be fine enough to stop it before a laugh is raised. In that case it may be charged with the subtlety of wit. But, if the poetic feeling predominates, the sense of wit is merged in that, and requires an after-thought to recall it; as when Shakspeare describes how the populace rushed to see Cleopatra coming up the river Cydnus, leaving Antony in the market-place: he

> "Did sit alone,
> Whistling to the air; which, but for vacancy,
> Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
> And made a gap in Nature."

"But for vacancy" is a phrase that piques suggestion. It may be that the air dreads leaving a vacuum if it goes to see her. It may be that Antony's whistling vaguely detains it. Or it may be that the air is in a mood so vacuous that it cannot entertain any preference for any thing, even for Cleopatra. And the possibility that the atmosphere could all leave and go elsewhere is an extravagance at once large and subtle. But, just as the smile impends, the ample poetry of the whole passage checks it.

A passage from "The English Traveller" of Thomas Heywood, published in 1633, is thoroughly American in

its style of describing a drinking scene, and the shipwreck of the company by drink. The topers suddenly conceive that the room is a vessel laboring at sea: one climbs the bed-post and reports turbulent weather, whereat all go to work to lighten the vessel by throwing the furniture into the street. One man gets into the bass-viol for a cock-boat. When the constable enters he is taken for Neptune, and his posse for Tritons. In short, the American gift for exaggeration was started under an Elizabethan sun.

Sometimes the breadth of imagination produces the effect of wit by bringing two incongruous ideas under one statement. During a political procession, a remarkably dirty man, stopping in front of a small boy who was sitting on a fence, expected to have some fun with him. "Well, boy, how much do you weigh?" "As much as you would if you were washed." Such a free-soiler as that can be matched with nothing short of a line of Shakspeare:

"Lord of thy presence, *and no land beside.*"

The American would be quite capable of composing narratives in the Eastern vein, as in that series of fables called the Hitopadesa, which attributed to animals the passions and motives of men. The famous mediæval poem of "Reynard the Fox" presumes the same intelligence. Here is a specimen, whose slight flavor of coarseness is lost and forgotten in the genius of its climax. Just as a traveller was writing his name on the register of a Leavenworth hotel, a certain insect took its

way across the page. Laying down the pen, the man remarked, "I've been bled by St. Joe fleas, bitten by Kansas City spiders, and interviewed by Fort Scott gray-backs ; but hang me if I was ever in a place where these critters looked over the register to take the number of your room."

A Western editor, culminating in his description of a tornado, said, "In short, it was a wind that just sat up on its hind legs and howled."

Some of the Texan cows have been lately described as so thin that it takes two men to see one of them. The men stand back to back, so that one says, "Here she comes!" and the other cries, "There she goes!" Thus between them both the cow is seen.

All these American instances are conceived in the pure Shakspearian blending of the understanding and the imagination. But one more of them, perhaps the most artistically perfect of all, must suffice. A coachman, driving up some mountains in Vermont, was asked by an outside passenger if they were as steep on the other side also. "Steep! Chain lightnin' couldn't go down 'em witheout the breechin' on!"

We have seen in what the comedy of Falstaff's character consists. Its humor lies in the tolerance which his inexhaustible wile procures for his vices. We are all the time reconciled to his behavior, though in anybody else it would be outrageous, — "most tolerable and not to be borne." But such a Noachian deluge of animal spirits would carry away a bulkier man than he. It is love of fun more than villainous inclination which

leads him into many of his scrapes. When he is moralizing upon his course of life, and half-earnestly complaining that the Prince had been the ruin of him, the latter has only to interrupt this strain with, "Where shall we take a purse to-morrow, Jack?" when he drowns his megrims in the jolliest laugh, and draws his belt another hole for an adventure. The midnight frolic, with sack and supper afterwards, attracts him quite as much as the prospect of checking the consumption of his purse. He is quite conscious of a mercurial disposition that keeps the door ajar for every temptation. There are intervals of self-upbraiding — or are they seedy forenoons before the sherris sets in to wet his coast? — when he wishes the Prince were not such a rascally, fascinating companion. And we ought to put to Falstaff's credit the fact that to be hail-fellow with a prince has unsettled many a sterner virtue; and he says flatly to him that he wishes they knew "where a commodity of good names were to be bought."

When the old lord of the council rated him, he was too proud to seem to attend, but quite aware that he had been blown up in a justifiable way. His love of mirth is a better ally than the Prince, far more sumptuous and capable; for it helps us to condone his follies, and so qualifies him to be an object of Humor.

And reflection pursues the train which Humor starts. We are charmed into admitting that there must undoubtedly be many good native qualities, still unobscured, lingering in vicious haunts and courses; and Humor has no sublimer mission than to make us toler-

ate that thought. She seizes the coy hand of Philanthropy, and beguiles it "with nod and beck and wreathed smile" towards its rugged purpose.

There are some places which we only venture to visit in Shakspeare's company. We have been too well bred to seek our vices in such quarters, but not so well bred as to accommodate no vice. We cannot air our intolerance before the Searcher of hearts; perhaps we are grateful to him for that gift of Shakspeare which bids the tavern and the brothel be tolerable to our conscience by the touches of nature which make *the whole* world kin. Our respect for mankind is increased if the men who disgrace it can still be made to appear inseparable members of it. When we see the common air pressing in to ventilate the most infected places, we admire this brave, elastic quality, and rejoice to feel it fill our lungs. But what policeman or sanitary commissioner can we trust in a tour to inspect the cesspools of the world? Only such an one who has the counter-infection of his own impartial light and air. We follow in the wake of his geniality, forget to hold disinfectants to our nose, find the air still medicinal, since it has retained qualities belonging to ourselves; and we step from ward to ward with a reconciling smile.

We do not quite relish the rebuff which Prince Hal, after his accession, administers to Sir John. Our good-nature is wrenched by the abrupt transition from roystering fellowship and complicity with all of Falstaff's infirmities. We acknowledge that the King cannot go

on countenancing the courses which, as the Prince, he found so amusing; but we are sorry that he could not let down the tutor and the feeder of his riots more softly. His downfall carries Justice Shallow with him, to be sure, of whom he had borrowed a thousand pounds, fortunately for our sense of poetic justice: and there is some recompense for Falstaff's mortification in hearing Shallow whimper for his money; for he lent to the knight and to his golden prospects, not to the prodigal Sir John. And it is good to see the indomitable wit outflank even this disaster with the advice to Shallow not to grieve; he will be sent for in private; the King must appear thus sternly to the world.

The King has cut the cord of their mutual revelling at one stroke. Down tumbles Falstaff, and it breaks his heart; as Dame Quickly says, "The King has killed his heart." Nym says bluntly, "The King hath run bad humors on the knight, that's the even of it;" which Pistol adorns thus: "Nym, thou hast spoke the right; his heart is fracted and corroborate." There was a human heart, then, involved in his enjoyment of the Prince's condescension. Yes, and no reasons of state can quite reconcile us to the sudden frost which fell upon its flower, flaunting as it was and rank of smell; since both of the men interchanged it, and wore it on their breast as token of copartnership in folly. Shakspeare himself cannot convince me that there was kingliness in thus snapping up the partner of his revels and sending him to the Fleet. It would have broken the heart of any less bulky comrade. Perhaps it is the nat-

ure of kings and titled men to be suddenly forgetful of the humanness which generally makes a man ineligible to office; so that the kingship was a charter from Providence to give Falstaff his first sneap of retribution. None the less do we sympathize with him rather than with the King, because we are all prodigals out of office.

But notice the art of Shakspeare in this, that, if the King had broken with his old pal in such a way as not to hurt our feelings, we should not have been so well prepared to sympathize with the manner of his death. When that hour comes, we feel the full effect of Humor in the unwillingness to let our knowledge of his grossness and knavery break the legacy of his geniality. It sets in again, to take him off, "at the turning o' the tide." Dame Quickly, Bardolph, and the rest, cannot prevent reminiscences of his wit from seasoning their tears. Her story of his end, with its delicious inconsequence, cannot blunt the thrust we feel when he plays with flowers and babbles of green fields; and it suddenly occurs to us that the battered old sinner had once listened to the birds in the hedge-rows, and climbed summer trees to explore their nests. This bloated breather of tavern fumes had expanded a boy's glad lungs on the English hillsides, and shared the landscape's innocence. It just saves us from damning him, and we shift elsewhere the responsibility of doing that, though we are not prepared to go as far as Bardolph, who says he would like to be with him "wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell." "Nay, sure, he's not in hell: he's

in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom." Dame Quickly, "clear thy crystals," for at least he was none the worse for being witty; and Bardolph may some day find himself in company that is at once bad and criminally stupid.

HAMLET.

HAMLET.

IN this play it is common to look for an exhibition of humor in the scene of the Grave-diggers; but those personages are only amusing as a couple of common men whose profession seems to have buried both their feelings and their wits. One of them is accidentally witty when he asks, "Is she to be buried in Christian burial, that wilfully seeks her own salvation?" But he and his companion do not make good the promise of this opening text: they turn out to be tedious louts who bring ale-house chatter to a church-yard and only rise to the dignity of being ghastly, although we know that the grave they dig is for Ophelia. We do not properly recollect and feel this till they disappear and the music of the funeral train is heard. Their shovelfuls of dirt and bones make coffin-like cæsuras in their singing, but the songs are too trivial to be trolled over a pot; scarce are they a setting to an empty skull. They rattle so dryly you wish they might be dumped in and covered up. The sexton-riddles have little more juice in them, for they are the kind that boozy gossips clink out of their cans, and not the gay pursuivants of wisdom. We begin to reflect that such triviality does not become interesting because it is well hit off, and that in one respect it is not well hit off, since it recurs too tiresomely; and we are on the point of voting the whole

grave-digging business to be a mouldy impertinence, when there flashes upon us the better thought that Shakspeare was here deepening pathos upon the fair maid who must be the tenant of this grave so fatuously dug. To this complexion must we all come at last, and beauty cannot repel the loutish hands which take their fee for shovelling dirt upon its clay.

There is so little comic business in this scene that actors are at their wits' end to make it hold the audience. They used to wear a dozen or two waistcoats, and, pretending to be hot and blown, strip them off, one after another; wearing all the time an air as if each one was the last, until you doubted whether, instead of a man inside, there were any thing more than a yard-stick to measure vest-patterns with. So Thackeray takes George IV. to pieces by peeling away all the well-known articles of his apparel,—"under-waistcoats, more under-waistcoats, and then nothing." But the waistcoated business always secured the laugh which the clowns' insipid discussion could not raise.

This scene, as it stands in the Folio of 1623, had no existence in the earlier Hamlets, and was plainly an after-thought of Shakspeare as he moulded the play to its perfection.

In the vignettes of mediæval manuscripts and the frescoes of chapels, there were ghastly drawings of the Dance of Death, or the so-called *Danse Macabre.**

* One interpretation of this word gives it a Jewish origin, and makes of it the Dance of the Maccabees, established to commemorate the martyrdom of the seven brothers of the Maccabees, together with Eleazar

It was a retort of religious art upon the fleshly man by the spectacle of his own skeleton waltzing down "the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire." But blood runs counter to the violent bad taste of these unfleshed processions; they contrast with the warm truth of Nature too sharply for the work of redemption. Shakspeare was anxious not to point the old moral, but to enhance our pity: he needed this contrast with Ophelia. Perhaps he was recalling those paintings when he set the grave-digger dancing stark naked in his verses. "O rose of May, dear maid!" He purposely lifts a handful of mould to our faces, that we may smell the rose above it.

> "A pickaxe, and a spade, a spade,
> For ——, and a shrouding sheet:
> Oh, a pit of clay for to be made
> For such a guest is meet."

Taine mentions with surprise that the English audiences still laugh when Hamlet traces the noble dust of Alexander to its final bier in a bung-hole. The Frenchman does not relish the broadness of the incongruity between the great commander and a cask of ale. But the laugh comes rightly in with the boldness of fancy which suddenly brings together such opposite things. The effect is like that of witnessing any ludi-

and their mother, who went out to death in succession. This was imitated by a solemn dance of priests and civil authorities, who went out in turn and disappeared as if to death. Afterwards, in mediæval times, the dance was emphasized by the introduction of the figure of Death as the leader of it. Another interpretation derives the word from the Arabic *Makbar*, pl. *Makabir*, place of interment.

crous circumstance which takes no account of dignity. Extremes meet with a shock, as if a great orator's chair should be whipped away just as he sits down from his climax. Hamlet does not think it too curious to consider how indifferent Nature is to all our pomp: she is not impressed, and serves it with not one inopportune mischance the less.

After Hamlet's interviews with the ghost, the "antic disposition" which tints his behavior is ironical; his remarks keenly cut down to where our laugh lies, but scarcely let its blood. The mood does not throw open the great valves of the heart as the sun-burst of Humor does. We enjoy seeing with what superior insight he baffles all the spies who cannot play upon a pipe, yet expect to play upon him. This gives to the scene the flavor of comedy. In the churchyard we taste the sub-acid of cynicism, so that Yorick's skull is quite emptied of its humor, and is only an ill-savored text to a chop-fallen discourse upon mortality.

But Hamlet radiates a gleam of geniality at a moment when you are least expecting it, as events transpire which ought to kill, you would think, the very heart of such a feeling: it is, indeed, expiring, — caught as it falls in the arms of the coming Irony. Let us enter, with Horatio and Marcellus, the scene upon the platform after Hamlet's dread interview with a murdered father. No wonder that his wonted evenness of manner is shaken; and we hear him writing truisms in his tablet, in a flighty style, as, for instance, that a man may smile and be a villain. But let us also make a note of

that, as he did: it will interpret to us the tone of his subsequent demeanor which everybody thought was madness. In the mean time we are upon this spectre-haunted platform, seeking with his friends to discover what news the ghost brought. Hamlet trifles with them to put off their curiosity; but the scene soon rises to the solemnity of taking an oath, and one that is extorted by the experience of a vision which comes to so few that mankind has only heard of such things. But just as the human voices are about to pledge themselves to a secrecy which they must feel all their lives, and shudder in feeling, to be reflected upon them from the glare and publicity of purgatorial fires, a voice comes, building this terrific chord of a nether world up to their purpose, that it may unalterably stand. "Swear!" The deep craves it of them; it has joined the company uninvited, but they feel convinced that it is a comrade fated to go with them to their graves. "Swear!" it reiterates: no change of place can remove them from this importunity. The centre of an unatoned murder is beneath every spot to which they shift their feet.

Now the two friends of Hamlet possess nerves which have been hitherto tuned only by the vibrations of the sunshine or of the moon's unhaunted silver. Even if they had known of the murder, their interest in it would not have been personal enough to lend fortitude to help them tolerate this unseen visitor, the murdered man himself! What an encounter! Whose wits of earthly stoutness can sustain it? They feel, and so do we, that the awe is accumulating into a wave that may o'ertopple every sense.

Here mark how superior Shakspeare would have us estimate Hamlet to be, with a capacity of self-possession and a readiness to recur to it. He perceives their friendship to be sorely tried, and on the point of crumbling; and as men muster to repair a dyke, so his resource is prompt, drawn from a soul that can make even a ghost companionable, and no match at all for any bantering mood of his. Tush, my friends! it is no ghost at all: 'tis a "fellow in the cellarage." There's a human phrase for which this wild weather provides a rift; it touches the awe with a strange smile that relieves the men to complete their pact before all the blood of friendship curdles. And we who listen are also kept within our human kind.

"You hear this fellow in the cellarage?" What a sentence to puncture the abyss of the supernatural!

Then Hamlet shifts his standing-place for the sake of his friends; but the unavenged murder is underneath there awaiting them. So the Prince lightly rallies it for its knack of burrowing: he nicknames it an old mole, and the fancy is pleasant; for it occurs to him that he must work under ground for the future; so he calls the mole "a worthy pioneer." "Once more remove, good friends." Then, as he instructs them with minute precautions against ever seeming too wise about the subterranean disposition he may choose to follow, the awful revenge cries up again to them. But their nerves, by this time wonted to the strangeness, no longer need the relief of his ironical braving; so Hamlet dismisses that vein, and lets a murdered father claim the scene to close

it with its proper color subdued to the solemn reassurance, "Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!" Then our own spirits venture forth into calmness and hush of the breaking day.

Not the faintest streak of Humor appears in this tragedy to reconcile us with the drift of it. Polonius belongs to comedy, because he is an old counsellor who was once valuable, whose wits have grown seedy on purpose to delight us with his notion that he fathoms and circumvents the Prince. When a man's feeling of importance has outlived his value, so that his common-sense trickles feebly over the lees of maxims, and his policies are absurd attempts to appear as shrewd as ever before persons who are in better preservation, he belongs to the comic side of life. We cannot help smiling at his most respectable recommendations; for they are like hats lingering in fashion, but destitute of nap. He wears one of these, and goes about conceiting that his head mounts a gloss. There is not enough of Polonius left to tide him through this tragedy, unless it might have been in dumb show: he must lurk behind an arras to get himself mistaken for a king; and, as he does this after sending a spy into France to watch his son's habits, we have not a tear to spare. And we only think how delightfully bewildered he will be if his ghost gets out of the body, escaping a politic convocation of worms, in time to help receive the other ghost, and to understand then, if any wit is left over in him, that his king was murdered and Hamlet is harping on something besides his daughter. But his absurdity survives,

and is voiced by Hamlet in the scenes where the King tries to discover what has become of the body.

The theories which undertake to explain the nature of the "antic disposition" which Hamlet hinted that he might assume do not satisfy me that the heart of that mystery has been plucked out. But the key to it may be read engrossed upon his tablets. The subsequent behavior of Hamlet is the exact counterpart in Irony of the conviction that was so suddenly thrust upon him, and terribly emphasized by his father, that a man may smile and be a villain. To this point let a few pages of explanation be accorded.

In the first place, I notice that the behavior of Hamlet, which has the reputation of being feigned, is a genuine exercise of Irony, and consequently covers a feeling and purpose that are directly opposite to its tone of lightness; but it results organically from Hamlet's new experience, and does not require to be premeditated as madness would be. We see his vigorous and subtle mind set open by the revelations of the ghost; but it is too well hung to be slamming to and fro in gusts of real madness, and its normal movement shuts out the need of feigning. When his father first tells that he has been murdered, we find that Hamlet thinks himself quite capable of decision: there is no infirmity of purpose in that early mood to sweep to his revenge "with wings as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love." What is it that converts this mood into an irresoluteness which contrives the whole suspense, and in fact gives us the whole tragedy? First, partly, that his

father tells Hamlet he was murdered by his own brother. Then the question of revenge becomes more difficult to settle, especially as it involves widowing his mother; and it is noticeable that the father himself, who afterwards deplored Hamlet's irresolution, had previously made suggestions to him which hampered his action by constraining him to feel how complicated the situation was. The father's caution runs thus:—

> "But, howsoever thou pursu'st this act,
> Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
> Against thy mother aught: leave her to Heaven,
> And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
> To prick and sting."

This does not inhibit Hamlet from dealing retribution on the uncle, but clogs a mind so sensitive with the drawback of consideration for the wife: she is evidently no accomplice or confidant of the murder; that is clear from the uniform respect, and even tenderness, which the ghost craves for her.

But though Hamlet thinks that he is capable of decision, he is so only when the case presented to his meditation is so direct and plain that no chance for a fencing-match of motives is involved. The conviction which justifies his prophetic soul half disarms it. When the uncle is at his prayers, Hamlet might "do it, pat;" but the opportunity is too favorable: it paralyzes a mind of his consideration. He cannot bear to rush upon a man's back whose face is bent towards an act that has a savor of salvation in it. But when Polonius was concealed behind the arras and cried out, Hamlet impul-

sively utilized the moment of hatred of the supposed eavesdropper; but, finding he had killed the wrong man, his swift action passes into that impetuous arraignment of his mother which follows, and thus expends itself upon the nearest object. He took Polonius for his better, but his resolve is "sicklied o'er" by this mistake; and an almost blunted purpose proves seasonable armor for the King. People of far less nice reflection than Hamlet had would feel hampered by such an accident. It is in the nature of all of us to find a passion grow cool beneath the drift of an untoward cloud; so that I cannot conceive that Shakspeare meant to develop the whole tragedy out of an over-scrupulosity of speculation. The ghost himself, whose latest visitation is but to whet Hamlet's revenge, again diverts him from that point by bidding him turn and look where amazement sits upon his mother: —

> "Oh, step between her and her fighting soul!
> Speak to her, Hamlet."

And an arrowy current from a long accumulating heart sweeps through the midnight hours. Then, by the light of the succeeding day, we observe that Hamlet's mind has recovered its strain of irony: it passes for the flightiness that gets him despatched to England, where all the people are as mad as he. But Hamlet's nerves, though delicately spun, are spun of some toughness that never snaps nor ravels. His pulse "doth temperately keep time, and makes as healthful music" as any man's.

Throughout the play, a refined superiority is the keynote of his character. The "heavy-headed revel" of

the Danes seems to him a custom "more honored in the breach than the observance," though he is to the manner born and has a head not easily overthrown. He says to his fellow-students, "We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart." But he keeps himself aloof from contracting a habit. The same speech contains traces of the observation exercised by a soul that is sustained by the sound pith of virtue. It often chances, he says, that one vicious mole of nature is the fly in the ointment of the apothecary, and undoes all the noble substance. His tendency to speculate upon suicide belongs to a mind in which conscience is so supreme and strong that its ideal makes life scarcely tolerable. But there is no feeble whimper in the tone, nor when his friends are trying to dissuade him from following the ghost; he routs them and all our cowardice at once:

> "Why, what should be the fear?
> I do not set my life at a pin's fee;
> And, for my soul, what can it do to that,
> Being a thing immortal as itself?"

Yes, we — already the ghosts — are a match for any ghost. Self-poised and self-sufficing, his ambition is to occupy the kingdom of a mind. "O God! I could be bounded in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space." And, in the midst of the torrent that bursts from him to overwhelm his mother, there is that smooth, still eddy, "Forgive me this my virtue," and all the stars of his soul look down into it.

Shakspeare plainly meant us to infer that Hamlet had inherited the traits of a noble father: for who but such

a son could describe with impetuous remembrance the kingly qualities which had given birth to him? In his mind's eye, he could always see this father: —

> "Look here, upon this picture, and on this:
> See what a grace was seated on this brow!
> A combination and a form, indeed,
> Where every god did seem to set his seal,
> To give the world assurance of a man.
> This was your husband."

He is that man's son, and not his mother's.

> "Ha! have you eyes?"

What devil was it that made you seize upon this other man in a game of blindfold?

> "A slave, that is not twentieth part the tithe
> Of your precedent lord; a vice of kings!
> A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
> That from a shelf the precious diadem stole
> And put it in his pocket."

Look there! The dear hallucination of fatherhood! "What would you, gracious figure?" The ghost has come to put this sketch of memory into italics; as if filial appreciation had projected it upon the midnight, in the intensity of recalling his majestic soul. Only a son who was in all respects worthy to be born of Nature's nobleman could pay this debt of being nobly born, and give Imagination's birth to such a sire. See there, he is born! the son is father and mother: inbred posterity conceives its ancestor.

Thus I venture to suppose that, when Hamlet came to his mother, Shakspeare had not deliberated that the

ghost would join the party. But his brain kindled with the midnight passion, streamed over down into the pen, and the ink exhaled under the heat of Hamlet's reminiscence into the vaporous outline, which always startles us because it startled Shakspeare, — a sudden whiteness running high along the edge of Hamlet's swelling heart. The scene then shudders with deference to this unexpected presence, which only the son who conceived it can observe. Afterward the verse seems to become merely a coast to help the great wave fall back and subside.

It is possible to have Hamlet played in a style so greatly absorbed as to obliterate our knowledge that the father's custom is to take his cue from the climax of his son's speech and to appear. Then we reproduce the thrill that Shakspeare felt when he sat alone with awe and silence, and they suddenly drew him to their ghost.

I recur now to consider the nature of the oblique and enigmatic style into which Hamlet has fallen. It is not a deliberate effort to sustain the character of a madman, because such a person as Hamlet could find no motive in it: he could not need it to mask his desire to avenge the ghost, for he is Prince, an inmate of the palace, and supernaturally elected to be master of the situation. He says he has "cause and will and strength and means to do't." I conceive, then, that his mind, driven from its ordinary gravity, and the channel of his favorite thoughts diverted, instinctively saves itself by this sustained gesture of irony; and it appears to be madness only to those who do not know that he is

well informed of the event, and is struggling to set free from it a purpose. And why should a man of such a well-conditioned brain, a noticer of nice distinctions, have selected for a simulation of madness a style which, nicely estimated, is not mad? He could not calculate that everybody would interpret this difference from his usual deportment into an unsettling of his wits; for the style shows unconsciousness and freedom from premeditation. If he wished to feign distraction, he would have taken care to mar the appositeness of his ironical allusions, which are always in place and always logical. And, if he was half unhinged without knowing it, his speech would have betrayed the same inconsequence. Nowhere is he so abrupt, or delivers matter so remote from an immediate application, that he seems to us to wander, because we too have been admitted to the confidences of the ghost, and share that advantage over the other characters.

Since this essay was written, I have found, in the highly suggestive "Shakspeare-Studien" of Otto Ludwig, the following remarks, which are closely related to my own treatment of the subject, and provide some additional reflections: —

"Hamlet's subjective tendency is so predominant that we are surprised when he alleges no motive for assuming madness; nor is it elsewhere accounted for. It would have served his purpose much better if he had feigned a comfortable and contented, rather than an unsettled, mind. And, on the whole, one cannot at any point detect a reason why he chooses any active dis-

simulation. For he merely needed to remain undiscovered.

"We never hear him once reflecting upon his intention, though he runs to reflection on all topics. Just after the apparition, he merely remarks to his friends that, if he should appear to them to do strange things, they need not remark upon it so as to betray his object." Ludwig here alludes to the lines, —

> "As I, perchance, hereafter shall think meet
> To put an antic disposition on."

Hamlet tells them not to seem too wise about it. The theory of premeditated madness rests upon this passage, and upon one other, which will be noticed. But suppose that Shakspeare did at first entertain a purpose, borrowed from the old chronicle, of disguising Hamlet in some unusual vein, the psychological necessities of his character decided what that vein must be, as they also decided against the old chronicle in the matter of introducing a ghost. And Hamlet's mental quality is really shown by the vein into which it imperatively runs. He was overmastered and completely occupied by this mood of indignation at all the villainous cants of a smiling world. The temper grew so compactly beneath Shakspeare's pen that he could not interpolate into it any amateur simulations. The poet would not, if he could, have so diluted the terribly gathering sincerity which left that epithet of "antic" beached high up and disqualified for floating on its tide.

On Elsinore's platform, Hamlet felt that the sudden

complication would put him into strange behavior; he did not know exactly what, but he perceived it coming on Such a man estimates himself more shrewdly than the crowd imagines. He was aware of a mind that over-refined and idealized, and of a disposition to avoid too close realities. Any hint of nature or society sufficed to sequester him in a monologue. But now he felt some modification passing through him; it is scarcely yet articulate, but it is inevitable to a man of his quality. Hamlet may call his mood by whatever phrases suit the different emergencies; but, in the main, it is the breaking-up of his mind's customary exercise into ironical scorn at discovering the rottenness of Denmark.

The Greek word εἰρωνεία, whence our Irony is derived with its special meaning, had not yet been modernly grafted on the Saxon stem. Ben Jonson says:—

> "Most Socratic lady!
> Or, if you will, ironick!"

For the words *irony*, *ironick*, were at first used in English, and quite sparingly, to express the method of Socrates in conducting an argument; that is, by eliciting from an opponent his own refutation by asking him misleading questions. The words, in any sense, are not found in Shakspeare. Lord Bacon, in one instance, uses *irony* nearly in the modern sense; and that is Socratic only so far as a thing is said with an intent the reverse of its ostensible meaning.

The other passage upon which the theory of premedi-

tated madness rests occurs in the great scene with his mother, Act III. 4, during which she becomes convinced that Hamlet is out of his senses by seeing him kill the good Polonius, and hearing him rave as if he saw a spectre. She was the earliest of the critics and experts who are profoundly convinced of his madness. At the close of the scene, it occurs to him to avail himself of her misapprehension to procure continued immunity from any suspicion of design against the King. How shall he do this, — how contrive to clinch her conviction of his madness, and send her reeking with it to inform the King? His subtle intelligence does at this point invent the only simulation of madness that the play contains. He is just about to bid the Queen good-night: "So, again, good-night." Then the device occurs to him: "One word more, good lady;" and the Queen, turning, says, "What shall I do?"

> "Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:
> Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed;
> Pinch wanton on your cheek; call you his mouse;
> And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,
> Or paddling in your neck with his damned fingers,
> Make you to ravel all this matter out,
> That I essentially am not in madness,
> But mad in craft. 'Twere good you let him know."

This is the very craftiness of a madman, to try to convince people that, if he ever seems to be insane, it is for a sane motive. Hamlet reckons that the Queen is so deeply imbued with the idea of his insanity as to interpret this disclaimer of his into the strongest confirmation. Hamlet, moreover, not only seems to be

accounting for symptoms of madness, but to be making a confidant of his mother; he begs her not to betray the secret object of his strange behavior. This seems to her to be the very quintessence of madness, to confess to her that he is feigning it out of craft, and to suppose that she would not apprise her husband, who must be the special object of that craft and most in danger from it. He must be indeed preposterously mad; so in parting she pretends to receive his confidential disclosure: —

> "Be thou assured, if words be made of breath,
> And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
> What thou hast said to me."

She may safely promise that, when she means to repair to the King with quite a different version of Hamlet's condition, the very one upon which he counts to keep the King deceived. And in the next scene she conveys her strong impression to him: —

> KING. What, Gertrude? How does Hamlet?
> QUEEN. Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend
> Which is the mightier. In his lawless fit,
> Behind the arras hearing something stir,
> He whips his rapier out, and cries, "A rat!"
> And in his brainish apprehension kills
> The unseen good old man.

She is the mother of the physiological criticism which issues from insane asylums to wonder why Hamlet is not an inmate: and Hamlet himself, by deceiving his mother, furnished to psychological criticism the text that he was mad in craft. Between the lines of the genuine Hamlet you can read that Shakspeare belonged to neither school.

Hamlet gives us unconsciously an opportunity to infer his ability to frame the incoherences which real madness suggests to one who would feign it. It occurs directly upon the Queen's suspicion, who, being unable to see her husband's ghost standing in her chamber, exclaims, —

> "This is the very coinage of your brain:
> This bodiless creation ecstasy
> Is very cunning in."

Hamlet, repelling the insinuation, says, —

> "It is not madness
> That I have uttered: bring me to the test,
> And I the matter will re-word, which madness
> Would gambol from."

And herein he implies that as he can construct the phrases of sanity, being all the time of a sound mind, so the soundness would serve him to invent the *non sequiturs* of madness. If, then, he purposed to feign it when he said that perhaps he might hereafter put on an antic disposition, the reader may ask why so subtle a person did not carry out his plan. No doubt, it occurred to him that, as he travelled towards his purpose, his demeanor must be of the kind that would cover up his traces. But he could baffle Polonius and the other spies by the natural penetration of a mind that suspicion had sharpened. Those emergencies did not call for any style of feigning. It is enough for him to finger the ventages of a recorder and invite Guildenstern to play upon it; the latter understands that he knows no touch of Hamlet, and leaves the heart of that mystery to be voiced by the varying breaths of critics.

When Hamlet explains to Polonius that he is reading slanders, and then describes the old man himself as having a plentiful lack of wit together with most weak hams, yet holds it hardly fair to have it thus set down, — "For yourself, sir, should be old as I am, if, like a crab, you could go backward," — Polonius, who is nothing if not satirical upon himself, muses apart, saying, "Though this be madness, yet there's method in 't;" and there he blundered as patly into Shakspeare's secret as he did into his own death.

And why do so many actors make Hamlet appear to be conscious of the manœuvre to throw Ophelia in his way that the King and Polonius may mark his tone from the place where they hide? Shakspeare has left no loophole for this supposition that Hamlet, observing the trick, assumes a tone of flightiness towards Ophelia, in order to throw off the spies and make them infer that he is mad. The scene being over, the King is wrong when he says, —

> "Love! his affections do not that way tend;"

but right when he adds, —

> "Nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little,
> Was not like madness."

Of course it was not; and the whole scene with Ophelia is ruined for Shakspeare's purpose by this modern contrivance of the theatre to deprive Hamlet of his spontaneous and uncalculating mood.

Otto Ludwig notices that his madness is "alluded to by Ophelia as having broken out between the first and

second acts; and that is another strange thing in Shakspeare. Then, too, the style, if it was dissimulation, is such as to bring to pass the opposite of what he seems to have intended. So far from being disguised by it he is rather betrayed. And what is the use of any feigning when he does things like that of contriving the mock play? For that betrays him to the King more than it does the King to him. It makes the situation all awry, because the King must now know on what footing he is with Hamlet. At all events, the courtiers keep telling how danger is threatened to the King from Hamlet: they have no means of fathoming the King's offence. They merely presage some danger to the King, and they manifest no surprise. Hamlet must be conscious that he would be in great peril if the King knew that he knew every thing; the King would be put on his defence, and he was quite capable of contriving another murder to forestall retribution for the first one. Why, then, does he keep on feigning? Yet we do not observe that he hits upon any expedients to meet this possible case; it does not even occur to him before he concocts the trial-scene."

Ophelia thinks that she sees

> "That noble and most sovereign reason,
> Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh,"

because she cannot understand his unflattering talk that appears to be disclaiming any regard for her and any desire to marry her. In all those sentences that make such a coarse rupture with love and soil the previous sentiment of their intercourse, there is no trace of a dis-

tracted mind. How could we expect this maid to be prepared to entertain such monstrous irony? It was as much Shakspeare's intention to have him misunderstood as to represent him so occupied by the sweeping scepticism that follows the disclosure of villainy. This irony of the most sombre kind, the mental mood that corresponds to such a harsh awakening, was not customary with Hamlet, who was by nature mirthful before this murder happened.

And notice how this ironical tone is kept up by him all through Ophelia's misconception, into which she falls because Hamlet's mood is too overpowering, and she thinks he has a wrecked brain from which she can rescue nothing to enable her to claim the salvage of loving him. When he meets her after many days of unaccountable neglect, she returns the few remembrances which were messengers of the happier hours of his affection, but he casts discredit upon these sacred tokens. He never meant them, in fact he never gave her any thing. But she says, "Yes,"

> "And with them words of so sweet breath compos'd,
> As made the things more rich."

Has the bloom been rubbed from them, and their perfume lost? Then, says the self-respecting maid, tearing the presents by bleeding roots out of the heart where they had lodged to fructify, take them again,

> "For to the noble mind
> Rich gifts wax poor, when givers prove unkind."

"I did love you once," he says. "Indeed, my lord,

you made me believe so." Hamlet is enraged at his own love, and appears to have discarded it, for that too may smile and be a villain, or hers may. "You should not have believed me: for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock, but we shall relish of it." That is to say, if I had felt true love grafted on my stem I should have received and imparted its flavor of sincerity. But nothing is sincere: "I loved you not."

Hamlet's observation of human nature had furnished him with elements which only needed provocation to develop into this uncompromising irony. His mother, married to that satyr of an uncle,

> "Or ere those shoes were old,
> With which she follow'd my poor father's body,"

might well cast a slur upon the sex in his opinion, and prompt the text which cynics use, "Frailty, thy name is woman," — all but Ophelia: it does not include her until all life's illusions vanished with the ghost. Then she would do well not to walk in the sun, and would be safest in a nunnery.

Previous to that, he had dispatched a missive to her, which is commonly supposed to have been written on purpose to foster the notion that he was mad. But its tone does not seem to me to have been rightly interpreted. It begins in the style of Pistol: "To the celestial, and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia." Then comes a verse fit for a valentine, —

> "Doubt thou the stars are fire,
> Doubt that the sun doth move;
> Doubt truth to be a liar,
> But never doubt I love."

So far the mocking spirit of his irony does not fail him. But the mood changes, for this was written just after the scene in Ophelia's chamber when he seemed to bid her an eternal farewell. Remembering this, he breaks the tone and adds, "O dear Ophelia! I am ill at these numbers: I have not art to reckon my groans; but that I love thee best, oh! most best, believe it." So with impetuous emphasis he confessed afterward upon Ophelia's grave. Nothing could more precisely convey to us his mental condition than this mixture of moods.

In the churchyard scene, we observe that Hamlet recurs unconsciously to his ordinary mental disposition, because he is alone there with Horatio, whose grave and silent friendship is congenial. It is the foil to Hamlet's restless speculation; it calls a truce to the civil war between his temper and his purpose. He is pacified in the society of Horatio, who gives him a chance to recur to his native mental habit. As he naively pours out his thoughts, how little does Horatio answer! as little as the ground beneath their feet, less laconic than the lawyer's skull. He is a continent upon which Hamlet finds that he can securely walk, the only domain in Denmark that is not honeycombed with pitfalls. Turning toward Horatio's loyal affection, he feels a response that is articulated without words. As little need the forest reply to her lover save in dumb show and in obscure reflex of feeling.

The artless nature solicits confidence: its still air disarms and dissipates the unrelenting irony. Then we see that Hamlet was naturally more inclined to that use

of satire which indicates an ideal far lifted above the methods by which men live. He puts that fine sense into the skulls of the politician, the courtier, and the lawyer, and we acknowledge the satirical tone of an exalted mind. And this lends to that scene a feeling that in it Hamlet recurs to himself, and resumes the usual tone which always advertised him to his friends. To them his long maintenance of ironical behavior, broken by so few sallies of his healthy satire, was additional confirmation of his madness because it was so unusual with him. Old friends remembered nothing of the kind; they were first puzzled, then convinced, and we saw that Polonius hurried to show his insapiency by attributing the craze to love for his daughter. 'Tis very likely, they all thought, for they could refer to no other probable cause for it.

It is by unconsciously remanding Hamlet to Irony that Shakspeare has expressed the effect of an apparition, and of the disenchanting news it brought, upon a mind of that firm yet subtle temper. Lear's noble mind tottered with age before grief struck it into the abyss of madness. Constance stands before us, like Niobe, all tears, or sits with sorrow; but she was a too finely tempered woman to drip into craziness, till health, hope, and life broke up. Shakspeare has not represented any of his mature and well-constructed natures as capable of being overthrown by passion the most exigent or events the most heart-rending. They preserve their sanity to suffer, as all great souls must do to make us worship them with tears. So Hamlet, being incapable of mad-

ness and lifted above the necessity of feigning it, gives to every thing the complexion of the news which has revolted his moral sense, — that is, the King, his uncle, is not what he seems; his own mother's husband does not appear to be a murderer. The State of Denmark is rotten with this irony. No wonder that his brain took on the color of the leaf on which it fed. Oh, every thing is not what it appears to be, but only an indication of its opposite, and must be phrased by contradiction! He is really in love with Ophelia, but this irony conceals it. With the mood into which he has been plunged, his own love is no more worth being seriously treated than is old Polonius, whom he knows excellent well, — he is a fishmonger; that is, not that he is a person sent to fish out his secrets, as Coleridge would explain it, but that he is a dealer in staleness, and yet not so honest as those who only vend stale fish.

If we return to a period in the play which follows closely upon the scene of the taking of the oath, Ophelia herself will discover for us the turning mood in Hamlet's character. The time and action of the piece allow us to suppose that he soon went from the oath-taking to visit Ophelia. Naturally, he turned from that bloodless and freezing visitation to see life heaving in a dear bosom and reddening in lips which he had love's liberty to touch. The disclosures of the ghost had worked upon him like a turbid freshet which comes down from the hills to choke the running of sweet streams, deface with stains of mud all natural beauties, and bury with the washings of sunless defiles the mead-

ows spangled with forget-me-nots. His love for Ophelia was the most mastering impulse of his life: it stretched like a broad, rich domain, down to which he came from the shadowy places of his private thought to fling himself in the unchecked sunshine, and revel in the limpid bath of feeling. How often, in hours which only overcurious brooding upon the problems of life had hitherto disquieted, had he gone to let her smile strip off the shadow of his thought, and expose him to untroubled nature! The moisture of her eyes refreshed his questioning; her phrases answered it beyond philosophy; a maidenly submission of her hand renewed his confidence; an unspoken sympathy of her reserve, that flowed into the slight hints and permissions of her body, nominated him as lover and disfranchised him as thinker; and a sun-shower seemed to pelt through him to drift his vapors off. But this open gladness has disappeared underneath the avalanche of murder which a ghostly hand had loosened. He ventures down to the place where he remembers that it used to expect him; but we know that it has disappeared. His air and behavior announce it to us. The catastrophe seems to have swept even over his person, to dishevel the apparel upon that "mould of form." In this ruin of his life Ophelia is the first one buried; for she was always more resident in his soul than maintained within a palace, and his soul is no longer habitable.

Polonius has just been giving those scandalous instructions to his pimp to waylay the Danes in Paris, and, by insinuations of ill-conduct in Laertes, worm out

of them possible admissions of its truth. He wants to know how his son is spending money in the gay capital, how many times he gamed, was overtaken in drink, or visited "a house of sale." The pimp is to draw on his fellow-countrymen by pretending that Laertes is given to all these things: he knows the man; 'tis the common talk about him at home; you cannot surprise him by any thing you say. Says the old manœuvrer:

> "See you now;
> Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth:
> And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,
> With windlasses, and with assays of bias,
> By indirections find directions out."

No wonder that Hamlet in the churchyard, kicking the pate of a politician, called it something "that would circumvent God." The state-craft of old Polonius has lived so long without a change that its garments are dropping from its limbs. Now see what an indecent forked radish it is. But the scene is eminently in its place, and has nothing incongruous with what transpires before or after; for the incident is cunningly contrived to prepare us to find him applying his principle of the windlass and indirect purchase to the relation of Hamlet with his daughter; and it breeds in us a contempt for the notion that the Prince has been made mad by love.

Ophelia enters to her father:

> "Oh, my lord, my lord! I have been so affrighted!"

Then she describes Lord Hamlet entering with garments all disordered,

"And with a look so piteous in purport,
As if he had been loosed out of hell,
To speak of horrors. . . .
He took me by the wrist, and held me hard;
Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face,
As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so;
At last, — a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down, —
He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound,
That it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
And end his being. That done, he lets me go:
And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
For out of doors he went without their help,
And, to the last, bended their light on me."

Polonius decides that it is the very ecstasy of love. Yes, it is, but ecstasy that has made an assignation with despair. The two feelings meet at the rendezvous of Ophelia's description, where they display to us the yearning scrutiny that a man throws into the eyes of an expiring love: it is too passionately dear to be surrendered into the inane; it is too selfishly personal to be consistent with his future purpose. For he had married a bride at midnight who is still expecting him. It is the consummation of one murder by another. For such a bridal as that, to leave her cheeks on which the color comes and goes between her love and his renunciation, "like heralds 'twixt two dreadful battles set," seems to shatter and end his being. But let him fall to such perusal of her face as he may, he sees the complexion of the ghost through each warm feature; and its pallor stands even there to wave him apart to an

interview in which all seeming becomes debatable, for rascally things may smile. He shades his brow, and his eyes are two magnets which he detaches from her heart, as he surrenders his last confidence in a stale and unprofitable world.

The irony reaches its most powerful exercise in the second scene of the third act, where Hamlet avails himself of the arrival of play-actors to test the King with his mouse-trap of an interlude. The Athenian mechanics played Pyramus and Thisbe with the simple intention of contributing their duty and homage to the nuptials. We see the humor of its juxtaposition with courtly scenes and weddings. But Hamlet, in his interlude, pretends amusement and mimics a murder to conceal his knowledge of the real one. "No, no, they do but jest, poison in jest; no offence in the world." His light talk with Ophelia is nothing but the audacity of excitement and expectation. His baffling of Guildenstern with the pipe; his making Polonius see a camel, a weasel, and a whale in a cloud, — covers the dreadful necessity which drives him, in the witching time of night, to that upbraiding of a mother, and that second meeting with a dead father, which will make men's breath bate and their veins creep while English is spoken in this world.

What other mood than Irony could a soul with such a secret for its guest spread for entertainment? Too strongly built and level to be cracked with the earthquake of madness; too awfully overclouded to sparkle with imaginings of wit; too daunted and saddened with

the thought of a dear father in purgatorial flames to break into the geniality of Humor, — all his mirth lost of late, there is no resource, no method of relief to the mind that is strained to live with dissemblers and swear vengeance to a ghost, but to dissemble too with an irony as ruthless and sweeping as the crime. He saves his wits which might otherwise justify suspicion and go all distraught, by unconsciously assuming that love, marriage, chastity, all honorable things, and friendship too, are crazes, and he that banters them alone is sane.

But when he knows that the grave, near which he stood and satirized the careers which men pursue, was another piece of irony, since Nature by keeping Ophelia alive and beautiful really meant death by her, it destroys his own tendency to be ironical, and he breaks forth with an intense sincerity; then we take the point of his previous behavior.

> "I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers
> Could not, with all their quantity of love,
> Make up my sum."

And as his soul was thus ample in its love, so was it in all serious and ennobling things, — too much so to grow deranged, enough so to create the concealment and defence of all his innuendo.

The tone recurs when Osrick is introduced, and makes a speech full of pompous platitudes about Laertes, — "an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences, the card or calendar of gentry," and so on. Hamlet mimics the style; and you would think he was just such another natty phrase-monger as Osrick, whose

macaronic manner he assumes to indicate his aversion from it. "Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you; though, I know, to divide him inventorially would dizzy the arithmetic of memory, and yet but yaw neither, in respect of his quick sail. But, in the verity of extolment, I take him to be a soul of great article; and his infusion of such dearth and rareness, as, to make true diction of him, his semblable is his mirror; and who else would trace him, his umbrage, nothing more."

I wonder that the psychologists have not greedily picked up this obscure and fantastic passage as a specimen of his craft in feigning.

But Osrick belonged to the prosaic sort of minds which took up so readily with the theory of Hamlet's madness; all of them incapable of irony, therefore not competent to fly into his meaning; limited, like the dodo and other wingless birds, to running along the plain appearance. "Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him," says Osrick.

So Hamlet could sport, who went towards his death with a presentiment which his soul was great enough to put aside, and also give him breath to say how great it was: "We defy augury: there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all." No crotchet of real or assumed madness could lurk in the repose of such a man.

THE PORTER IN "MACBETH,"

THE CLOWN IN "TWELFTH NIGHT,"

THE FOOL IN "LEAR."

THE PORTER IN "MACBETH."

THE vulgarity of the Porter's language, in the third scene of the second act, repelled Coleridge, who pronounced it to be an after-thought of some baser hand. "I dare pledge myself to demonstrate," said he, that it was an interpolation of the actors. Other critics have followed with the same feeling of condemnation. But only Shakspeare could have risen above such a conventional estimate, and have put this piece of solid consistency into that part of the tragedy which it strengthens: there it stays in the only place where Nature could have lent to it her justification. We can readily admit that the undisguised lechery of Pandarus in "Troilus and Cressida," and the brothel scenes in "Pericles," were subsequent additions to those plays by a pen that was accustomed to deal in broad effects without regard to the organic exaction of the other characters. Perhaps they were fragments of older plays left over by carelessness, or, what is much more likely, introduced as gags by the play-actors. But we can spare them out of the legacy of Shakspeare because they are not in the manner which he used when broadness served his purpose. When the gross details are hung over and fondled lewdly, recurred to morbidly, laid open with ingenious particularity till we detect the sickening odor of the dissecting-room which rises from slashed

and naked subjects, we may determine at once that the scene preserves not one stroke of Shakspeare's pen. The lines seem suffocating in a close and tainted place. What a brisk draught ventilates the honest coarseness of the Porter! what a light, bantering touch hits off the vice which is needful to finish the portrait of Falstaff! Even Parolles, his prototype, only ventures far enough to make a scene coherent with Helena's unspoken thought.*

Let us see if Nature was not fortunate in finding the Porter at his post at an hour when he was needed as never before.

The air around the castle of Macbeth "nimbly and sweetly" recommended itself to Duncan's senses; and Banquo noticed that the swallow, most confiding and unsuspicious of birds, approves the place "by his lov'd mansionry." On every frieze, buttress, coigne of vantage, Nature had colonized this domestic wing, as if to hint to the wayfarer "a pleasant seat," peace and unviolated sleep within. But we remember that a raven had croaked the fatal entrance of Duncan into the castle. The swallows twittering in the delicate air cannot drown this omen of insecurity: as we enter with the unconscious Duncan, the weird sisters slip by us from

* All's Well that Ends Well, Act i. 7. Though I suspect here either a fragment of an early form of the play that kept its place in the stage copy and passed into print unchastened, or some phrases interpolated by actors. Something has been dropped out between Parolles's "Will you do any thing with it?" and Helena's recurrence to Bertram's leaving for the court, "There shall your master have a thousand loves;" so that the scene is in an imperfect condition.

their blasted heath, and the house darkens with a fated purpose.

It was an unruly night, and the owl clamored the livelong hours. Towards morning, after the accomplishment of the murder, Lady Macbeth snatched the bloody daggers from the hand of her husband to carry them back into the chamber. The air that was interrupted at the lips of the gracious Duncan seems breathless as he, appalled at the deed; and our consciousness of it sinks into an awful silence. Just then a knocking at the gate is heard.

De Quincey, in an essay "On the Knocking at the Gate," rightly notices that it reflects "back upon the murder a peculiar awfulness and depth of solemnity," and he explains this effect. "When the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard, and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them."

Admirable as this criticism is to justify the profound art of Shakspeare, it does not seem to me entirely to exhaust the effect produced by the knocking. It not only makes known to us that human life recurs, and thus emphasizes our sense of the unhuman world of murder, but it also startles us with the sudden con-

sciousness that the human which thus recurs does it in entire ignorance of the scene at which it knocks. That makes us catch our breath, to feel how thoughtlessly life is about to stumble into the tremendous scene. What a contrast of innocent unconsciousness, — so innocent, so remote from the event, that we should think it was impertinent if our pity for the shock it brings upon itself did not prevail! We wonder who will first discover what has occurred, whether man or woman; somebody is doomed to blunder into the ghastliness of that room where Macbeth murdered sleep. What will be the sensation that thrills from the inhospitable bed around which the angels of honor and loyalty ought to have watched with spotless wings? Some one steps into this pool where all the safeguards and trusts of human life lie drenched. How will he manage to escape from it, and will the tongue be palsied "with the act of fear" to refuse to the lips words adequate to express the villainy? And yet this must be done.

We therefore become aware of this additional feeling, that the life which knocks at the gate, though unconscious, is pregnant with the design of an overruling Power; just for a moment, there seems to be the supernatural arrival of something with a commission to detect the murder. Every knock smites the bare heart of Macbeth, who may well exclaim, "Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou could'st!"

Shakspeare makes another world for Macbeth, — a sequestered hell. The knocking announces the existence and reappearance of another life, as De Quincey

notices; but he does not note the fine prolongation of the Hell into the humorous fancy of the Porter who comes to open the gate.

To the old French taste, this Porter was one of the Shakspearean violations of decency and tragic sentiment, — a vulgar fellow who has been waked out of a drunken sleep, and who talks outrageous matter that is the farthest removed from murder, so that solemnity is affronted and abruptly leaves the hearts which it had just monopolized. But the more we dwell upon Shakspeare's characters, "the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement, where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident."

The Porter, as if he had been privy to the transactions of the night, translates each knock into a candidate for admission into his quaint fancy of a hell, of which he keeps the gate. Fleay, in his "Shakspeare's Manual," shows that the Porter makes allusions to contemporaneous circumstances of the year 1606, when "Macbeth" was first produced. "The expectation of plenty:" wheat, barley, and malt were extraordinarily cheap. The "equivocator" is the Jesuit, Garnet, who was tried for gunpowder treason in that year. "Stealing out of a French hose:" the fashion of hose became short in 1606; yet the tailors took the old measure of material and cabbaged the difference. So that the Porter belongs to that year, and could not have been subsequently interpolated.

"If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have often turning the key. Who's there?" "An equivo-

cator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale; who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to Heaven! Oh, come in, equivocator!" Yes, this is the very house for him to come to, where a treason has just been committed which will be unable to equivocate to Heaven. "I'll devil-porter it no farther: I had thought to have let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire." If the outer life is to gain admission at all again to this castle, this grotesque hint of the hell within undoes the gate appropriately: by no abrupt transition, and by the bridge of a perilous smile, human life is reached again. The Porter delays by his successive fancies, till we begin to grow impatient, like those emissaries of Heaven who shiver at the gate. This impatience, humorously created for us, introduces another human feeling to qualify our awe; and thus we rejoin our common humanity.

When the Porter lets in Macduff and Lenox, he seems to have admitted also a very garish and vulgar kind of day, that displays loosely some infirmities of men, unconscious of the more awful crime within,—a very broad and unequivocal daylight that lies sharply on all objects without toning them. The Porter's disquisition upon drinking and lechery is apparently superfluous and revolting, but it is really well conceived; for we want something to carry our mood as far as possible away from Duncan's chamber and from all thoughts about discovering the deed, because Macbeth is about to enter. "Our knocking has awaked him." Then our

feeling, which has gained a temporary relief, is able to take up again the awful clew, and to wait during Macbeth's feigned unconsciousness till Macduff bursts upon us with his horror. Moreover, the carousing which the Porter mentions was the cover to Macbeth's opportunity, and just keeps the night alive in our memory, while we think how innocently drunk the whole household was to provide a human weakness for an act of death. Macbeth enters, whose wife conceived the stratagem of the drinking, and soon the result of it arrives. An after-clap of Hell settles back on the Porter's traces; but he has performed his function by letting life and human nature in upon the sexless and monstrous scene, and may now vacate his post.

Still, the Porter is conventionally vulgar, and cannot be accepted by a taste that is more fastidious than the world itself is. But, if the world chooses to be vulgar, why needed Shakspeare to have imported this base touch of realism into his art? Only by the permission of Humor, and the justification of an exigency to drag our feelings back to life by the handiest strand, however coarse it may be. And after he had invented that thrilling moment of the knocking at the gate, he cannot get along without the house-porter, who is the only one awake enough to let honest Nature in. So we must take him as he is, and admire the poet who did not send the Muse of Tragedy to draw the bolt.

The Agamemnon of Æschylus reaches a breathless moment of suspense, when Clytemnestra has left the scene to plan the murder of her husband, and the

Chorus, shuddering with its divination of the deed, expresses our expectation. All at once a stifled exclamation struggles out from the interior of the palace: the Chorus whispers, "Hush! who is it that cries out, 'A blow'?" and the play soon closes with the sombre feeling unrelieved. Nothing intervenes to assist the spectators back to life, and to the other persons whose interests implicate them so deeply in the plot. There is but one interest and one action in a Greek Tragedy, and when that is reached the nature of the scene is exhausted; the poet has no more to say, and is not conscious of any craving for variety in his listeners. His play was an artistic embodiment of the current religious ideas, and so far was secluded, as the modern pulpit is, from manifold life. It is not possible to discover a place in these solemn developments of Fate, where a feeling of Humor could intrude. The Chorus, listening to the blow, intervenes instead of a Porter. It is the voice of an audience conscious of the crime. So is a modern audience conscious of Macbeth's crime, but that consciousness is itself the Chorus, whose ancient function is distributed through the silent hearts of the spectators, who are thus permitted to mingle in every awful occurrence, and therefore need to be restored again to the ordinary world of justice and emotion.

Shakspeare exhibits the supreme nature of his genius when he meets this exigency which antique religion did not feel. He admits the free play of life into its real closeness with all our moral and pathetic emotions; but we never find that Humor weakens the religious purpose

of the play, as it would if our private anguish were unseasonably interrupted by it, because our personal fortunes are not touched by the tragedy. We are implicated in the scene only by our instinct of observation and sympathy; that needs relief, but, if the blow struck us and became a "fee-grief due to each single breast," we could endure it as we do in real life, as we prefer to do, with a temper that keeps all other strings muted but sorrow. So the Humor which we would not tolerate when the tempest breaks upon our roof-tree, and is sullen within every chamber, is no unwelcome surprise when the heart is so keenly summoned by the mimic scene.

THE CLOWN IN "TWELFTH NIGHT."

The name of the Clown does not appear in the *dramatis personæ*, and only once in the text, Act ii. 4, where he is called Feste. All the dainty songs of the play are put into his mouth. Feste was the name of a distinguished musician and composer, probably a friend of Shakspeare. We may even surmise that he set to music one or more of his namesake's songs. There is no play which employs the element of music so frequently, or that speaks of it in the tender terms which only a lover of melody can use. It is admitted into the plot as a confidant and adviser, and allowed to sway the moods of the characters.

The Duke calls for Cesario (Viola) to repeat

"That piece of song,
That old and antique song we heard last night."

The Duke has forgotten that Feste, and not Cesario, was the singer. Fleay overlooks this touch of nature, and attributes the passage to an older play or first draught, which appears uncorrected in the present play. But the Duke is mooning about in his sentimental fashion, and vaguely recollects that Cesario was presented to him as one that could sing "and speak to him in many sorts of music." He had done so, no doubt, so that the mistake was natural to the distraught mind of the Duke, who seems to allude to it when he says immediately to Cesario, —

"If ever thou shalt love,
In the sweet pangs of it remember me;
For such as I am all true lovers are,
Unstaid and skittish in all motions else,
Save in the constant image of the creature
That is belov'd."

His obliviousness is indeed so profound that he blunders in dismissing Feste when the song is over, saying to him, "Give me now leave to leave thee." This, so far from being an imperfect reading, is a perfect touch of his abstruse mood. It amuses Feste, who says aside, "Now the melancholy god protect thee," &c. Every line and word of this beautiful scene is unalterably well placed.

We see that the Clown adds a good voice to his other gifts; he does every thing "dexteriously," and is in high demand for his companionable spirits. For Sir Andrew and Sir Tobey his songs are blithe and free: all the ballads and ditties that had vogue in Feste's time are at

his tongue's end, and he is always humming snatches of them. For the Duke he has cypress sentimentalism, urges death to come away, and forbids a flower sweet to be strown on the black coffin of the Duke's luxurious woe. We can imagine what a face Feste pulled over the minor key which so tickled the Duke, whose love was after all nothing but the spooning of a professor of rhetoric. He can take off his sighing disguise as quickly as Viola can transfer herself into woman's weeds. Olivia is well aware of this, and having just lost her brother is in no mood for a flirtation. She knows he is a noble and gracious person, but she has read the first chapter of his heart, and "it is heresy." The Clown, who is as usual Shakspeare's keenest and most amused observer, knows this well and puts it into the neatest language: "The tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal! I would have men of such constancy put to sea, that their business might be everything and their intent everywhere; for that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing." And this turns out true enough; for the Duke with all sail set after Olivia, and a spanking breeze on his quarter, tacks nimbly in the teeth of it the moment Olivia is married by mistake, and Cesario becomes a woman. The only serious sentiment in the play is the one so tenderly concealed in the disguise of Viola.

In Act iii. 7, Viola enters, meeting Feste, who is playing the pipe and tabor. Her simplest remark he makes the pivot of a jest, and is never tired of tossing words. He plays with them as a juggler with balls;

they all seem to be in the air at once. There never was such a jaunty and irrepressible quipster. Yet when Viola says to him, "I warrant thou art a merry fellow, and carest for nothing," his reply, "Not so, sir, I do care for something," betrays the serious temper which lies under all his fooling to furnish the appositeness of his remarks: —

> "For folly, that he wisely shows, is fit;
> But wise men, folly-fallen, quite taint their wit."

Viola, who says this, might adapt a text of Paul, and apply it to Shakspeare's people, — "For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise."

Of all Shakspeare's clowns, he is the best endowed with a many-sided mirth, as indeed he should be to pass lightly through the mingled romance and roystering of the play and favor all its moods. The sentiment of the Duke is as inebriated as the revelling which Malvolio rebukes. Olivia's protracted grief for her brother is carefully cosseted by her, as if on purpose to give the Clown an opportunity.

> CLO. Good madonna, why mournest thou?
> OLIV. Good fool, for my brother's death.
> CLO. I think his soul is in hell, madonna.
> OLIV. I know his soul is in heaven, fool.
> CLO. The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul being in heaven. — Take away the fool, gentlemen.

All the characters, noble and common, have some weakness which he intuitively rallies. The charm of the comedy lies in these unsubstantial moods of the chief personages which consort with the more substantial

whims and appetites of the others. The only sobriety is vested in the Clown; for all his freaks have a consistent disposition. So the lovely poetry of the mock mourners alternates with the tipsy prose of the genuine fleshly fellows. Their hearty caterwauling penetrates to Olivia's fond seclusion, and breaks up her brooding. Feste is everywhere at home. When he plays the curate's part, Malvolio beseechingly cries, "Sir Topas, Sir Topas!" The Clown says aside, "Nay, I am for all waters," — that is, for topaz, diamond, gems of the first water, all many-colored facets I'll reflect. And he does so in this conversation which he holds with Malvolio, who says, "I am no more mad than you are: make the trial of it in any constant question." Then Feste airs his learning: "What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild-fowl?" and makes his question lead up to a sharp retort, when Malvolio answers, "That the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird;" for then Feste says, "Thou shalt hold the opinion of Pythagoras ere I will allow of thy wits, and fear to kill a woodcock lest thou dispossess the soul of thy grandam." For it was a country notion that the woodcock was the foolishest of birds; so he translates Malvolio's grandam into one, and leaves him to inherit her absence of wits. And Malvolio was so devoured by mortification and anxiety that he does not notice when Feste cannot restrain his burlesquing knack, but makes the pretended curate say that Malvolio's cell "hath bay-windows, transparent as barricadoes, and the clearstores toward the south-north are as lustrous as ebony."

The Clown is not only quaint, droll, full of banter, sly with sense, like clowns in the other plays, but he is the most ebullient with spirits of them all, ready for the next freak, to dissemble himself in the curate's gown and carry on two voices with Malvolio in the prison, keeping him on the rack the while, or to carouse with the two knights till daybreak, and delight them with manufacturing burlesques. "Thou wast in very gracious fooling last night, when thou spokest of Pigrogromitus, of the Vapians passing the equinoctial of Queubus: 'twas very good, i' faith. I sent thee sixpence for thy leman: hadst it?" Feste resumes the burlesquing humor: "I did impeticos thy gratillity; for Malvolio's nose is no whipstock: my lady has a white hand, and the Myrmidons are no bottle-ale houses." As for "bottle-ale," the phrase occurs once more in Shakspeare, 2 "Henry IV.," ii. 4, to express contempt, — "Away, you bottle-ale rascal!" So Feste does not think small-beer of the Myrmidons, or retainers of Olivia, who might scent out his sixpence as quickly as Malvolio. Was the bottling of ale just coming in, to the immense disgust of the loyal Briton, who thought nobly of the ancient brew and would not have it save mightily on tap? The words, "Pigrogromitus," "Vapians," "Queubus," sound like the names which Rabelais manufactured to cover his sly allusions to public personages; but they cannot be traced. It is just possible that Shakspeare invented them to burlesque the words and style which mariners and travellers brought home to vapor with to eager listeners in the taverns: marvels of the East that would not stay in Damascus,

but came by caravan, — of Virginia, Guiana, and the "still-vex'd Bermoothes," the "Anthropophaginian," * men "whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders," not positively discredited by Sir Walter Raleigh; one-leg and one-foot savages, seen by early sailors to the coast of Maine, — all the misunderstanding and exaggeration of a new period of adventure and discovery of new lands were bountifully nourished upon sack and canary in the London taverns. What legends were fabricated at the Mitre in Cheapside, the Swan at Dowgate, the Boar's Head near London Stone, the Ship at the Exchange, the Red Lion in the Strand! These were haunts of Frobisher's and Drake's men; of Sir Humphrey Gilbert's, fresh from Newfoundland in the only ship that was saved; of Barbour's expedition to Roanoake in 1584; of Gosnold's, in 1602, to Cape Cod and the islands in Buzzard's Bay. The sack grew apprehensive and forgetive, and justified Falstaff's eulogy. Bermoothes was not the only region vexed by devils and spirits, but every tavern from Plymouth to London. A trace of Shakspeare's interest in these London entertainments is found in the "Tempest," where Trinculo wishes that he had Caliban in England for a show. "There would this monster make a man: any strange beast there makes a man; when they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian." Captain Weymouth was sent by Sir Ferdinando Gorges and Chief Justice Popham, in 1605, to found a

* Reproduction of *anthropophagi* as heard from some guest by the host of the Garter Inn, in "Merry Wives of Windsor," iv. 5.

colony upon the coast of Maine. He kidnapped five Abenaki Indians near the mouth of the Sagadahoc, and carried them home. Three of these were kept by Gorges at Plymouth, and the other two were sent up to London to the care of the Chief Justice. One of these died there. The passage in the "Tempest" is strong confirmation that Shakspeare went with the other cockneys to see him.

Though Shakspeare empties all his own love for pure fun into this clown, he makes of him the only cool and consistent character in the play, and thus conveys to us his conviction of the superiority of an observer who has wit, humor, repartee, burlesquing, and buffoonery at command; for none but wise men can make such fools of themselves. Such a fine composition is apt to be misunderstood by the single-gifted and prosaic people; but this only piques the bells to their happiest jingle; and a man is never more convinced of the divine origin of his buffooning talent than when the didactic souls reject it as heresy. All Shakspeare's clowns brandish this fine bauble: their bells swing in a Sabbath air and summon us to a service of wisdom. Feste has no passion to fondle, and no chances to lie in wait for except those which can help his foolery to walk over everybody like the sun. Even when he seems to be wheedling money out of the Duke and Viola, he is only in sport with the weakness which purse-holders have to fee, to conciliate, to enjoy an aspect of grandeur. His perfectly dispassionate temper is sagacity itself. It discerns the solemn fickleness of the principal personages. They are all

treated with amusing impartiality; and it is in the spirit of the Kosmos itself which does not stand in awe of anybody. It seems, indeed, as if the function of fool, and the striking toleration which has always invested it, was developed by Nature for protection of those of her creatures who are exposed to flattery and liable to be damaged by it. Not for shallow amusement have rich and titled persons harbored jesters, who always play the part of the slave of Pyrrhus, at proper intervals to remind them that they are mortal. All men secretly prefer to know the truth; but the pampered people cannot bear to sit in the full draught of it. Its benefit must, however, be in some way conveyed to them. Bluff Kent is banished for saying to Lear, in the plainest Saxon, what the fool kept insinuating with impunity. Therefore, no genuine court has been complete without its fool. The most truculent sceptre has only playfully tapped his liberty. Timur the Terrible had a court-fool, named Ahmed Kermani. One day, in the bath with a crowd of wits, the conversation fell upon the individual worth of men, and Timur asked Ahmed, "What price wouldst thou put on me if I were for sale?" "About five-and-twenty aspers," rejoined Ahmed. "Why," said Timur, "that is about the price of the sheet I have on." "Well, of course, I meant the sheet." When the business of kingship becomes decayed, the office of fool is obsolete.

Feste bandies words with Viola, and makes her submit to delicate insolences: her distinguished air cannot abate him. He pretends to wish to be convinced by Malvolio that the latter is sane, but concludes that he will never

believe a madman till he can see his brains. Feste keeps his own head on a level keel as the sparkling ripples of his drolleries go by. Shakspeare's intention is conspicuous in him to make all the clowns the critics of all the other personages, and kept in the pay of their creator.

When the play is over, the Duke plighted to his page, Olivia rightly married to the wrong man, and the whole romantic ravel of sentiment begins to be attached to the serious conditions of life, Feste is left alone upon the stage. Then he sings a song which conveys to us his feeling of the world's impartiality: all things proceed according to law; nobody is humored; people must abide the consequences of their actions, "for the rain it raineth every day." A "little tiny boy" may have his toy; but a man must guard against knavery and thieving: marriage itself cannot be sweetened by swaggering; whoso drinks with "toss-pots" will get a "drunken head:" it is a very old world, and began so long ago that no change in its habits can be looked for. The grave insinuation of this song is touched with the vague, soft bloom of the play. As the noises of the land come over sea well-tempered to the ears of islanders, so the world's fierce, implacable roar reaches us in the song, sifted through an air that hangs full of the Duke's dreams, of Viola's pensive love, of the hours which music flattered. The note is hardly more presageful than the cricket's stir in the late silence of a summer. How gracious has Shakspeare been to mankind in this play! He could not do otherwise than leave Feste all alone to pronounce its benediction; for his heart was a nest of songs whence

they rose to whistle with the air of wisdom. Alas for the poor fool in "Lear" who sang to drown the cries from a violated nest!

THE FOOL IN "KING LEAR."

The bauble of the Fool in "King Lear" rings us into a horizon that, before we reach it, mutters with the premonition of madness; and we wonder if any humor can find shelter with us underneath that blackening sky. When the Fool joins our company, we search his features in vain for a trace of Feste's and Touchstone's temper. That spring of geniality has been stirred by the king's misfortunes till it is roiled into irony; and we recognize the only tone that can take lodgings in this tragedy. It makes rifts in the gathering tempest, not of clear sky but of lighter cloud-racks, around whose edges the first lightnings run. We have ceased to smile and begin to forebode. All cheeriness and whim are getting blotted out so fast that we share the Fool's longing for the shelter of the hut when heaven began to pelt that old gray head, "crowned with rank fumiter," upon the heath.

His irony is tart; but commiseration for his master saves it from ill-temper. Just as it threatens to become cynical, a song occurs to him, which is a low call drawing him back, as the mother's voice lures her child from the edge of a cliff ere it falls over: —

> "Then they for sudden joy did weep,
> And I for sorrow sung."

"When were you wont to be so full of songs, sirrah?" It was not his wont, then? By no means. This court-jester stood by when the latent disease of the King's brain was suddenly unmasked by the sincerity of Cordelia, whose love was more ponderous than her tongue. He saw her transformed, in an instant of the King's first lesion, from a daughter into an outcast. First, wonder at a blow which no one could anticipate, and then pity at seeing that love's vessel thus pushed over and its rareness spilled, has destroyed his appetite for mirth. He unconsciously resorts to the Fool's alternative between jesting and gravity, which is a fusion of both these qualities in irony; and he catches at the ragged edges of old songs when he feels himself tumbling into bitter aspersion of the King. He has, too, been affrighted by the sudden and groundless vehemence which hurls the faithful old Kent into exile as soon as he dared speak a word for Cordelia. What! Daughterhood stamped out like a spider, life-long loyalty sent to the dogs! This palace can dispense with jesting for the future; and our wits must yield a different grain. Touchstone is the wise fool of life's comedy. But Lear snatches at his fool's bauble, invests him with the pathos of a broken sceptre and a crumbling reason, and may well inquire when he learned to sing. "I have used it, Nuncle, e'er since thou madest thy daughters thy mother." His songs insinuate so much unpalatable truth that he tells the King to keep a schoolmaster that can teach his fool to lie, and pretends that under the circumstances, with the King undertaking to be the house-fool, lying might be an accomplishment.

No person — not even the shrewd, observing Fool — had detected in these early inconstancies of the King the tokens of impending insanity. But Shakspeare meant, no doubt, that the whim of abdication, the division of the kingdom, and the absurd project to travel with a hundred knights from one daughter's house to another, should hint to us that the royal brain was breaking down. An expert in the phenomena of insanity would have predicted what occurred so suddenly. But it shocked these unprepared beholders, and curdled every smile on the Fool's face into lines of mockery that ran full with tears. No king's misfortune was ever so bantered by its own pathos, as love and loyalty, contrasting with ingratitude, subsidized a Fool for the service of pity.

But he cannot long employ his Irony upon our hearts, for events develop a dread earnest temper. There is no longer place for insinuation in the scene. The fortune of Lear seems to challenge all the elements to match it. As the reason topples, it appears to be clutching at the sky to save itself, and brings it down in the winds and lightnings of midnight to sympathize with its own eclipse. The Fool is cowed by the madness and the storm as they intermingle; his brave innuendoes die away; and he supplicates Lear, in plain language of human discomfort, to seek some shelter, even under such a blessing as one of his daughters can bestow, for that seems less inclement than the night. His vein runs very thin during Lear's delusion that he has his daughters in court and is trying them; and it soon

disappears, swallowed in the quicksand of the king's lunacy. Kingdom, friends, reason, family, are all crumbled into this wreck of an old father, who pretends at last to hear the soft and gentle voice which used to temper the pride of his state and keep him human: he comes in to us hugging the hanged Cordelia to his cracking heart, to feel that she will come no more; she, whom he drove from his palace gate with violent misapprehension, will come no more, — never, never, never! Oh, it has grown too piteous for the wisest Fool: he can never share these scenes; his humor cannot lace these thundrous lines. Do they swell to the measure of the firmament itself, or is it our heart which is swelling to occupy that space? Yes: "Pray ye, undo this button." It is the heart, too big for any thing that ever made it smile. The lightnings of fate rend it into the drops of pity, and they wash all tolerating smiles away.

Humor is too deeply implicated with our mortality, too warm a comrade, too judicious a friend in our extremities, to choose such hours of disaster to virtue for any task of reconciliation. Awful and questioning spirits come; and Humor, yielding to them our hand, stands aside to wait, but yields it warm enough to keep warm through any grasp till it may be claimed again.

Shakspeare's instinct divined the precise moment when the bells of the Fool's bauble could not compete with thunder, nor the balls upon his cap draw off the bolt. But, while the muttering comes up from the horizon and begins to be heard between the lines, the bells still shake, as in the last scene of the first act, where

they render more sombre the expectation of what must finally come down upon our heads. The recollection of Cordelia gives the King a lucid interval: it breaks like a breadth of heaven into his brain, and into ours through that little sentence, "I did her wrong."

"Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?" "No." "Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has a house." "Why?" "Why, to put his head in; not to give it away to his daughters, and leave his horns without a case." Lear listens absently to the quaint chatter; for he detects the threat which has been approaching from the distance, and is now quite near.

> "Oh, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet Heaven!
> Keep me in temper: I would not be mad."

After helping Kent and Gloster bear off the King just before old Gloster's eyes are plucked from his head, the Fool disappears from the tragedy, as if all light were to be quenched with such an act, and all moods but terror to be stamped with those jellies under Cornwall's feet.

> "Make no noise, make no noise; draw the curtains!"

WOMEN AND MEN:

MARIA, HELENA, IMOGEN, CONSTANCE.

WOMEN AND MEN.

MAN draws near to woman with the fly-net of his analysis, thinking to steal up and capture the secrets of her disposition. He finds a distance drawn across his way which he never entirely passes. It is the distance of sex. The greatest intimacy of marriage itself, which blends two beings into one fate, and compels them to set up housekeeping on the principle of mutualism, is still evaded by motives and moods which the woman holds in reserve, not by calculation, but through the instinct of a difference which the husband cannot entirely penetrate. It is not that man reaches results chiefly by the processes of judgment, and woman chiefly by a method which is not thinking so much as it is a taste or touch of the objects she observes. But she is removed from his scrutiny because the complexity of sex constructs her soul, becomes the essence of her motives, decides her virtues and her vices, and modifies the intellect itself. She contains all qualities, but not in the masculine proportion. Sex also irrevocably decides for the average man, as for the average woman, the plus and minus of each attribute. Woman's mode of life must so defer to the tendency of her sex, that a variety of objects are prevented from pressing into her experience. She is less actively in motion from place to place than man, who mingles with many crowds and learns to

reflect upon their actions. Her brain is not so multifariously stored with facts and relations, because there are some scenes from which she must always be remote. If, apart from sex, a considerable portion of a person's training has been by hearsay, that person's judgments will be sentiments rather than reflections ; but sex decides that hearsay shall enter largely into woman's training. The rude, fierce, cunning competition of naked men in the palæstra, without blush or apology, gave girth to the breasts which were bucklers before the glory and the arts of Greece. Many a situation that is as coarse as a pugilist puts us in prudent trim. Women derive from our education a benefit which their muscle is too delicately draughted to procure. Events that do not mince their speech give us a thorough knowledge of our mother-tongue. We overhear the other people, weigh their words, enrich ourselves with facts, or protect ourselves against omens. She is more likely to be well-behaved than man, but less likely to be tolerant of ill-behavior. When she feels particularly virtuous, she is apt to condemn swiftly and fatally where man would suspend his judgment till all the qualifying facts were put into the case. Human development has in this respect conferred upon man a great advantage that dates from the barbaric rule of the stronger, and has been re-enforced by the varied experience of every generation. Just as woman is entering upon a more independent career, she betrays a deficiency in the quality of humor. Man was turned loose in the pasture to feed at random upon all the plants that drew nutritious and poison-

ous saps: stramonium and clover were indiscriminately cropped; but Heaven gave to its wild creatures tough stomachs to begin with. They effect a compromise with such complacency that literature is charmed to celebrate it; and the dew of humor condenses beneath a long-suffering sky. A powerful and happy digestion does not prefer the noxious weeds; but it has learned how to account for them, and to measure their effects.

Women are not good readers of any kind of plays. The movement and lapse of events in a novel are more congenial to their secluded life. And I venture to impute to the average woman a thinly running vein of humor as the reason why she finds such difficulty in admiring Shakspeare. Many of the finest women can never conquer their repugnance. There seems to be in it something of impatience at the dramatic intervals and the movement by incessant colloquy, something of an equanimity of passion, something of fright at the broad and powerful statement, which flinches at nothing; blabs dreadfully of Juliet's clandestine feeling; keeps Helena in contented ear-shot of Parolles, and lets her devise an indelicate solution of the plot; shows the sweet Marianna of the moated grange ready to help on another play with the same alacrity, and leaves Nature everywhere, in the most passionate or vulgar phases, to her absolute sincerity, and concedes to her the freedom of the dictionary. Women do not like to be charmed along through scenes of tender and lofty feeling to stumble over the sentences of porters, carriers, camp-followers, fellows on a frolic; phrases that hiccough a decided waft of sack; clauses

that throw a leer in passing. Even the high passionateness of kings and lovers, when it is the purest, seems to the average woman to blaze with extravagance. To her it is the overstatement that kidnaps true sentiment and brings it up for the stage. She does not recall a moment of her life that could have recognized such feeling, or have framed for her secretest thought a corresponding whisper. Do her brothers and acquaintances smoulder with these wraths and fervors inside of their demure suits of gray-mixed and black? Are all the men who circulate in society, and enframe her waist at balls, liable to attacks of this erysipelatous condition? Does she sit at divine service with such neat packages of rend-rock in the pew? So the Shakspearean ideal of the great passions of mankind has to be watered for her through the modern novel, trickle by trickle of protracted rhetoric, drop by drop of overflavored style. She turns with resentful cheeks from Juliet's expectant mood, and manages to read pages that are too sickly to kindle a blush. And yet perhaps they are equivocal enough to have puzzled Dame Quickly and frightened Falstaff. Certainly the equivoque has not lost its voice "with hollaing and singing of anthems."

Some offences, chiefly those which concern propriety and chasteness, are so repugnant to a woman's disposition that they excite a fanaticism which sometimes is slow, and sometimes eager, to condemn the reputed offender. That is to say, the same disposition is competent to give credence to an accusation slowly, or to give it impetuously and with loathing. If there be a case

involving testimony, it is not deliberately weighed, its intricacies patiently pursued, its implications as well as its statements justly rated, and all the parts of it fitted to an opinion of innocence or guilt ; but there results instead a state of feeling from previous opinions and assumptions, which no testimony, however strong, can do much to reverse. Women, indeed, naturally shrink from familiarity with the testimony, and do not wish to reach an opinion by probing it. The defendant may enjoy the immunity of a woman's assumption that the charge is in his case incredible, and refuted by all her previous associations with his life ; or he may suffer from her want of any feeling derived from previous knowledge of his life, or from considerations dependent upon personal sentiment.

Woman's instinct of purity is specially intolerant towards the unfortunate members of her own sex. She will not hear a word : she is deprived of the power to weigh circumstance, environment, the complicity of others, the wile and treachery of life. The outcast does not even have the benefit of a trial. No court is held in which mercy seasons justice, like one that was long ago extemporized over the woman who knelt on the pavement of the Temple. The men in that crowd were chiefly interested to convict the Master, and not the sinner. If women were present, as is quite probable, they composed a jury that was adverse to the ruling of the court, unless they fell into sympathy from pique at the mock chastity of the men.

In the first scene of the " Midsummer Night's Dream,"

Hermia and Lysander are in love with each other. Demetrius, who was once deep in love for Helena, has transferred his midsummer inclination to this Hermia, leaving Helena as deep in love with him as ever, but finding Hermia full of disdain. Now Hermia's father would have her marry Demetrius ; so she and Lysander, to escape from this paternal preference, agree to meet at night, and fly together from Athens to a darling old aunt who lived at some Hellenic Gretna Green. At this point, Helena enters, who loves Demetrius as much as he now dislikes her. The lovers confide to her their purpose of flight ; and Hermia, for comfort, says that she will soon be beyond the reach of Demetrius. Then Helena is left alone to her reflections, during which she says, —

> "For ere Demetrius look'd on Hermia's eyne,
> He hail'd down oaths that he was only mine ;
> And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
> So he dissolv'd, and showers of oaths did melt.
> I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight :
> Then to the wood will he to-morrow night
> Pursue her : and for this intelligence
> If I have thanks, it is a dear expense :
> But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
> To have his sight thither and back again."

Coleridge frames, in a criticism upon this passage, a sweeping indictment of the feminine disposition. Starting with a misconception of the text, he appends to it a statement that does not seem to me accordant with the facts.

He attributes to Helena a "broad determination of ungrateful treachery," and then adds : "The act itself is

natural, and the resolve so to act is, I fear, likewise too true a picture of the lax hold which principles have on a woman's heart when opposed to, or even separated from, passion and inclination. For women are less hypocrites to their own minds than men are, because, in general, they feel less proportionate abhorrence of moral evil in and for itself, and more of its outward consequences, as detection and loss of character, than men, — their natures being almost wholly extroitive." *

Now there is no treachery in the act of Helena, because there is no damage in it to the runaways. If she supposed that Demetrius could prevent the flight or prevail over Hermia's repugnance, she would never have given the information to him. Her motive is entirely distinct from treachery, and is rooted in a truly feminine hope of disgusting Demetrius by showing the woman he loves running away with another man. This may cure his passion, and possibly revive it for herself. But she modestly says that even thanking her would be too great a strain upon him. Still, so far from fancying that Demetrius can detach Hermia from Lysander, she means to "enrich her pain," — that is, deepen it, by following to witness his despair at her rival's flight, then have him back again. For then, perhaps, his feeling may return

* This word was issued from Coleridge's private mint, but never got into circulation. He invented some words, not to avoid circumlocution, of which there is quite enough in his style, but to save trouble by extemporizing tallies for his thought, as surveyors use the nearest sticks on their line. The ecclesiastical word, "introit," — a passing from within to enter the church, — hinted to him "extroit," — a starting from without. He means that women proceed from social convention, and not from interior thought.

to her from the point of appreciating her act which disenchants him. All this we have to put down tediously to rescue Shakspeare's compactness from Coleridge's misrepresentation.

But it gives me an opportunity to suggest that women are less hypocritical to their own minds than men are, not because they feel less proportionate abhorrence of moral evil in and for itself, and more of its outward consequences, but because they have an organic instinct, that is due to difference of sex, to be swayed first by passions and inclinations that are entirely frank and unconventional, and afterwards by motives arising out of abstract principles. Therefore they are natively unconscious of something which men smile at or deplore, as they call it insincerity. In the description of one of his characters, Bulwer says, "That strange faculty in women which we men call dissimulation, and which in them is truthfulness to their own nature, enabled her to carry off the sharpest anguish she had ever experienced by a sudden burst of levity of spirit."

Thackeray shows how this native trait can run to viciousness: "When I say I know women, I mean I know that I don't know them. Every woman I ever knew is a puzzle to me, as, I have no doubt, she is to herself. Say they are not clever? Benighted idiot! She has long ago taken your measure and your friends'. She knows your weaknesses, and ministers to them in a thousand artful ways. She knows your obstinate points, and marches round them with the most curious art and patience, as you will see an ant on a journey turn round

an obstacle. Every woman manages her husband : every person who manages another is a hypocrite. Her smiles, her submission, her good humor, for all which we value her, — what are they but admirable duplicity? We expect falseness from her, and order and educate her to be dishonest. Should he upbraid, I'll own that he prevail ; say that he frown, I'll answer with a smile: what are these but lies, that we exact from our slaves? — lies, the dexterous performance of which we announce to be the female virtues."

But, if a noble woman would defend her art of complaisance, she might justly borrow the words of Queen Katherine, in that fourth scene of the second act of "Henry VIII.," which is manifestly a portion contributed by Shakspeare: —

> "Heaven witness,
> I have been to you a true and humble wife,
> At all times to your will conformable :
> Ever in fear to kindle your dislike,
> Yea, subject to your countenance, — glad or sorry,
> As I saw it inclined. When was the hour
> I ever contradicted your desire,
> Or made it not mine too? Or which of your friends
> Have I not strove to love, although I knew
> He were mine enemy?"

In cases that are not involved with passion, inclination, or some personal and social coil, the moral judgment of woman is natively far better than fear of detection. And, if a man prides himself upon some superiority in this respect, he has something to conceal. What social circle in the world is not made eminent by cases of a sense of duty that sustains itself against

inclination and personal respects! Suffering heroism holds up ill-fated alliances and conceals them nobly from the common eye; there is protracted sacrifice which puts the finger of silence to quivering lips. There are not a few women whom youthful sentiment, like a paid emissary, has decoyed into cruel disenchantments, and there betrayed them to the stake: the fagots are piled, the years contribute fresh fuel, but the flames extort no cry. For the highest considerations of conscience, the tenderest maternity, lights a counter-fire that shrivels the complaint. The world never discovers that this *auto-da-fé* is going on of a woman who is too delicate and noble to dash the sparks of it among her neighbors for the brewing of tea-table gossip, and the kindling of little bonfires of sympathy.

But, in social and public transactions, the average woman can be the bitterest partisan and the most reckless defyer of justice: it is when her sentiment is involved, her pride is hurt, a specific interest of house or person threatened, her egotism irritated. With men, partisanship is the result of complex motives; with woman, it is an unmixed, aboriginal passion. Bosom friends never know two sides to a quarrel: the woman who is implicated is sure, when she makes her statement to female intimates, of an absolute and abject belief in her truthfulness. They will not take the trouble to learn, or even care to inquire after, the position of the other party. If it be a man, he will be perfectly conscious of this manœuvre of nature without taking much pains to set up a counter-movement, or to

create a party of his own. Manifold occupations supply a salutary rebuke of pettiness, and help to drive the matter from his mind. If it be a woman, much time and feminine resource will be lavished in self-exoneration. She will go to and fro in a vigorous canvass of society, to create a clan and clothe it in the plaid of her sprightly confidences. Its bucklers coldly gleam in every assembly.

There are some vices which circulate through the world without invading the seclusion of woman. She cannot imagine what they are; consequently they remain so vague that she has no more blame for them than for the nebulæ in Orion. Financial operations, for instance, are so intricate that she shrinks from following, and so foreign to the course of her life that they secure a languid attention. Her lover or husband can easily make it appear to her that his violations of trust are either the knavery and carelessness of others, or admissible procedures; and, if she is as deeply in love as he is in offence, she will resort to connivance rather than divorce. Jessica plunders her father, and then calls out to her lover, —

> "Here, catch this casket; it is worth the pains."

But, not being quite sure if she has taken enough, she returns to gild herself "with some more ducats." It was a highly profitable "irregularity:" —

> "Two sealed bags of ducats,
> Of double ducats, stol'n from me by my daughter!
> And jewels, — two stones, two rich and precious stones,
> Stol'n by my daughter!"

One of the stones was a diamond worth two thousand ducats, and another was a turquoise which her mother gave to Shylock before marriage. That she exchanged in Genoa for a monkey. A critic says of these transactions, "We recognize a certain equity in their furtively taking what we think he ought to have voluntarily bestowed." This anxiety to protect Shakspeare from moral blame disregards some feminine possibilities. Jessica's offence was the very one, the only one, of which she was capable; and, like all such lapses, her act was due to circumstances conspiring with latent tendency. We are not reconciled to her behavior by recalling the pound of flesh; for the theft of the jewels is as contrary to mercy as the stipulation in Antonio's bond. But love and sex prevail: she behaves like any full-blooded nature who has been defrauded of her rights, immured in a house with the "vapor of a dungeon," cut off from amusements and sympathies, from gondolas and serenades. She spends money foolishly after she gets it, thanks to the father who scrimped her. It depends upon how deeply we mean to hate Shylock whether his howls over the transaction of the monkey delight our ears.

There are many things which we have not allowed woman to understand: she has been stinted in her education and secluded in her pursuits beyond the organic requisition of her sex. Public affairs of the highest importance pass through her mind like the blurred impression made upon her by the multifariousness of a daily newspaper; and we know what candid awkward-

ness balks the attempt to seize and unsnarl the vital points of the morning sheet. The marriages and deaths, being in large type and a conventional place, compete with the advertisements of low-priced cottons and flannels, and are only forgotten when the column that flatters with the latest fashions storms the well-dressed heart. Perhaps the same sheet announces the last pathetic moment of the Crimean campaign, which men follow with the eager interest of participants, as they are pledged to the cause of either party because they estimate the weal or woe of human races. Perhaps the Franco-Prussian war is creating an historic epoch in the politics and religion of Europe, involving new adjustments of the social and democratic life, making Luther's half battles whole ones, and leading all the bitter experiences of France into the solution of a republic. It is safe to say that the majority of women are indifferent to the closely printed columns which men follow with almost the literal precision of the compositors who set them up. Perhaps the statement may be hazarded that the emancipation of woman depends considerably upon her rivalry with man at the newsstands, and her patient sifting of the contents of her purchase. The proposition is not so fantastic as it may appear. I have been astonished at the repugnance of sprightly and intelligent women for the labor that the genuine news of the day from every nation requires, as it deserves, to be extracted from papers of value and dignity; for each throb of honest news carries forward the second-hand that marks the hours of mankind.

Woman prefers to know the interests of the planet by hearsay, to sit over her fine task and listen to some man who has sopped up each crisis: he distils the day into a few drops of her luxury. It evaporates like the scent upon her handkerchief. She will hardly derive the benefit of discussing it. Her native sense ought to be furnished with a just appreciation of public affairs, enlightened observation of them, well-balanced abhorrence of all the iniquities, sustained and practical reflection upon the great proceedings of the world. If the claims of the household can never afford her time for this, she must decline the peril of increasing masculine ignorance by the weight of a single ballot.

But, in private and domestic life, what Aladdin's lamp she rubs in secret to enrich her day! When a woman has a good deal of common-sense, she never uses it to ponder with. It is a daylight that pervades all at once without arriving by degrees. It is wonderful to see her swiftness in unknotting man's perplexed forehead with her talent that is used to snarls. It was not the result of a process of inferring and considering: she is the most considerate when she taxes herself the least to be so. And, if you ask her how she reasons upon any subject, she might reply as Julia did when pressed to give her reason for thinking Proteus the best man:—

> "I have no other but a woman's reason:
> I think him so because I think him so."

A woman will tell you that probably she drops out stages, and does not have to pass through all the terms which detain a man; so that the process is like evapo-

ration, — a broad and insensible deduction. This is a constant surprise to man, who supposes that his logical ability must be superior in all exigencies, because it is so essential in science and the classification of the world, and wherever he trains facts to observe their proper sequence. But woman's brain vaporizes syllogism, and a subtle æther vibrates. Her limitation is a great superiority on its appropriate field.

Hermia tells Theseus that Lysander is a worthy gentleman. The Prince replies: —

> "In himself he is;
> But, in this kind, wanting your father's voice,
> The other must be held the worthier.
> HER. I would my father look'd but with my eyes!
> THE. Rather your eyes must with his judgment look."

But that is past expecting or desiring, for there is often a better judgment in her tact.

It is also a reason for the inability of man to thoroughly fathom all her moods and motives, for it is the advantage which sex procures for her. We sometimes understand her secret convictions as little as we do the minds of children, who are as removed from us by time as she is by sex. It is a distance equally difficult to surmount; for though we too have been children, and suffered or rejoiced in secret, we have entirely forgotten how it was all done, or with what sequences of moods and partial reasonings our experience was gained. If, therefore, there be always something of audacity in the attempt to analyze the natures of women, in life itself or in Shakspeare's living characters, the confession must soften the offence, and, if there be failure, pardon it.

Those gestures of the female intelligence which we may call intuitive afford her an advantage in her intercourse with the other sex. Notice how Shakspeare's women read the men and understand them better than the other men do. Those who are most interested to know the disposition of their associates are not the first as a matter of course to discover it; but it is frequently, and in grave junctures, revealed by the swift instinct of some woman. Men are not conscious when they are observed by women, because the survey is made so silently. We are as little conscious of the unobtrusive forenoon which envelops every act and feature and sets them in plainness. The glance of an observing woman does not pierce a man at any spot: it surrounds the whole of him at once impalpably. Or sometimes it is one swift flit of her face across your own, like the shadow of a bird's wing. It is gone before you can declare that she looked at you. But the glance was an estimate: it cost her scarce a second to peruse every cubic inch of you, and audit a hundred years of ancestry. The glance is withdrawn, and goes into obscurity, like an instantaneous sun-picture, there to deepen into distinctness. Almost every woman has set up a gallery of these impressions, which she shows rarely, and to her trusted intimates alone. But there you are preserved, — a simpleton, a rowdy, a gallant, a rogue, or a gentleman; one who respects, who honors, or who thinks lightly of her; one who is capable of valuing or of depreciating; one whose hand is clean enough to touch or nettlesome to roughen her delicacy; one whose secret and unspoken effluence

is salubrious, or somewhat doubtful, to be kept at bay, to be considered while you are the most profuse of honorable sentences. In the long run, you will generally succeed in justifying all her silent estimates. She took you unawares, in a moment when your lip did not move with your tongue, or the eye motioned to her something dubious, or the whole face was a daybreak of clarity and honor. Ponder well, and lend it second-thoughts, when a woman bids you, upon the motion of her instinct, be cautious or be confiding, be profuse or chary, be still over-ears in love or cured of that distemper. To a young man the freedom of a good woman's estimate of other men supplements the university ; for he is a pupil who is fathomed previous to being taught.

Are our steps dogged then, and all our proceedings watched by non-commissioned detectives, who enjoy the immense advantage of being born in every house, and furnished with a passport into every other ? Is a badge concealed in every reticule, to be displayed when the occasion comes to arrest us, which may be at the moments of our critical feelings, when confidence, and not exposure, is vital to us? A fine woman has not the consciousness that belongs to spies : she is guiltless of the act and the intent to watch us. Men deliberately set themselves to the work of scrutiny, and pay out all the line they have to fathom an associate, and bring up his mud or gold-sand sticking to the sinker. It does not always reach the grounds of his being. But clear-headed women envelop other natures as the air which simply exists to drench all objects through their pores, by the stress of

miles of heaven's blue piled on it. As every unconscious breath we draw compels the air to enter and circulate through us, so all our involuntary moods and actions invite the woman's perception. Who is not willing to exist immersed in this frank element that is without a motive ?

But if some obscure caprice in a woman is always ready to steal out and nibble at her judgment, or if some obliquity faults her intrinsic nature, she can mistake you as rapidly as otherwise she might correctly hit. Nothing can be more unjust and cruel, more bitterly fostered, more viciously proclaimed, or virtuously insinuated, than the impromptu misinterpretations of a shallow or prejudiced woman. She may not be deep enough to be dangerous ; but her prejudice saturates the mind, and there is no margin of a woman left. She plies her pea-blower in all companies : the little projectiles carry breath enough to tingle. They hit the people who ought to be your friends with a blow aimed by something that is unlike yourself, and which you are not capable of becoming. It is yourself soured in her spleen, poisoned by her spite. Some unsatisfied emotion degenerates into a damaged judgment.

If the instinct of womanhood be vitiated in a person of strong character, who insists upon being admired, and sweeps into her net all the adoration that is afloat, or if she is unsexed by any kind of mean ambition, her touch for man will be blunted. She will probably report his cutaneous defect, and overlook his spiritual substance. In treasuries and mints, the selection of women is made

to count the coin, because by the mere handling they can detect and throw aside the light weights and the spurious metal. In the test to which women subject men, the hands must be unsophisticated, and the blood of a born lady, high or low, must feed the subtle finger-ends.

When Sir Toby Belch says that Sir Andrew hath all the good gifts of nature, Maria's quick taste answers, "He hath, indeed, — all most natural." A great many men are boozily unconscious of the traits of their companions; but all women know each other thoroughly; and they tacitly allow for each defect, unless some spiteful moment aggravates them. To say that they know each other like a book is to overestimate the great majority of books. The more delightedly they greet each other, the more keenly are they remembering mutual frailties. Perhaps those of the charming morning-caller will transpire when her call is over. To your surprise, you learn that she is intriguing; that, indeed, she will not stick at a falsehood, — well, an indirection; that she is a very pushing woman, and quite capable of fawning if any social thrift will follow. And this absent friend atones for the constraint of her call by unbosoming her hostess to some other listener, who is pleased to learn that the fabric of the world will not crumble so long as both of them have daughters and sisters, who must get into society where marriage benedictions are pronounced, or where style, at least, is piety.

How nicely Maria decants the essence of Malvolio, without spilling or clouding, when Sir Toby asks her, "Tell us something of him"! Now Maria wants to

marry Sir Toby, so she bends to every breeze of his humor, but is never overset: she could not misrepresent Malvolio even to please Sir Toby who has been so rated for overdrinking. She tells the simple truth of her observation: the steward is "the best persuaded of himself; so crammed, as he thinks, with excellences, that it is his ground of faith, that all that look on him love him." Sir Toby first sees Malvolio in his true aspect, and exclaims with admiration, "She's a beagle, true bred!" So is every sound woman who is not called off the track by the small game of feminine crotchets and conceits.

Queen Margaret, the wife of Henry VI., has a mind so distempered by a hankering for political distinction that she misreads the grief of the good Duke Humphrey, the king's uncle, when she succeeds in degrading and banishing the Duchess. And she asks the King, —

> "Can you not see? or will you not observe
> The strangeness of his alter'd countenance?"

She interprets the sombre mien, the fixed look, and the stiff gait of the sorrowing Duke into evidence of a rancorous and treasonable purpose. But the King knows better.

> "Our kinsman Gloster is as innocent
> From meaning treason to our royal person,
> As is the sucking lamb or harmless dove."

He sees in Humphrey's face "the map of honor, truth, and loyalty." The Queen's ambitious discontent with the popularity of Humphrey discolors all his actions, so that she half believes he is at work to win the heart of the

common people, that he may supplant the King. This half belief is flung by her upon the face of Humphrey, into the very eyes of his loyalty, and embosses it with the leprosy of her slander.

The English people were scandalized by the interference of Alice Perers with the politics of the reign of Edward III. She was a "fair piece of sin," for whose sake Edward anticipated his dotage. When Parliament interfered to break up a scandal that astonished even the court of France, Alice was perfectly ready to take an oath never again to see the King; for she knew that he valued her counsels because he drivelled over her person. So she returned from exile in time to misrepresent the most honest and outspoken man in Parliament, Peter de la Marr, who was well acquainted with the back-stairs policy which she would fain import into the government of England. As history bids her shift across its light in the various outlines of her domineering temper, to show her to us seated on the bench with the judges, suggesting to them what their ruling must be, or as she drives a trade between the court and foreign envoys, and mistranslates to the King the bias of popular opinion, we perceive a woman whose facile sex is merely a sop to drug a king in order to control his policy. The pages of royal and republican annals are mildewed with these old spots of decayed womanhood. Like dead flowers put to be pressed against some sweet or lofty rhyme, their musty petals mark the place where a single vice enlisted all the fine perception of the sex against honest manhood and the spirit of the age.

Bertram, in "All's Well that Ends Well," is under the influence of Parolles, "a snipt-taffata fellow," who goes buzzing around like a "red-tailed humble-bee" in a vile yellow suit all stuck over with bows and trimmings. Bertram has been often advised to cast him off: "There can be no kernel in this light nut; the soul of this man is his clothes; trust him not in matter of heavy consequence." Bertram is a raw boy for discernment, and insists that Parolles is very valiant, and has a good knowledge of the world. His friends are obliged to lay a plot, and invite him to be witness to Parolles's cowardice and knavery: not till then will he confess to the crudeness of his judgment.

But Helena, though well disposed to like a man who is Bertram's companion, has read him thoroughly, and, moreover, has the instinct to perceive that the man's knavery is so inbred that it suits him better than honesty. Her observation is full of subtlety: —

> "I know him a notorious liar,
> Think him a great way fool, solely a coward;
> Yet these fix'd evils sit so fit in him,
> That they take place, when virtue's steely bones
> Look bleak in the cold wind."

The "evils" have a congenial place in such a temperament: a bleaker one would discourage the finest virtues. His nature fortunately cannot be reformed, since reform would turn a most satisfactory and harmonious miscreant into a scrubby gentleman. "And that's the humor of it," as Nym would say. Shakspeare puts this rare breadth of judgment into the mouth of a woman.

Imogen's step-mother, the Queen and wife of Cymbeline, is a strong-minded woman, who "bears all down with her brain." She rules the king by force or craft, and has arranged to marry Imogen to her own shallow-pated son Cloten. This ancestress of all the plotting step-mothers carries poison in her heart: her relatives may expect to find it in their food; for she is curious in distilling the essences of noxious herbs, under a scientific pretext to watch their effects in creatures not worth the hanging. But the compound that is ostensibly for rats is intended to dispossess Imogen of all her watchful liegemen, including her husband; and then, after getting her married to Cloten, the "mortal mineral" was meant to waste the King by inches to a grave that should be a royal footstool for her son.

Now the King has no suspicion of the simmering deviltry that he embraced. When all her projects are discovered, he exclaims, —

> "O most delicate fiend!
> Who is't can read a woman?"

Not he, certainly; for he had been fooled in the time-honored way of crafty women.

> "Mine eyes
> Were not in fault, for she was beautiful;
> Mine ears, that heard her flattery; nor my heart,
> That thought her like her seeming."

At the point of death, she confessed to her physician the whole of her unsexed intent. She never loved the King as Lady Macbeth loved her lord, but only affected the greatness got by him: she was wife to his place, but

abhorred his person. Who but a woman could play that game with such an air of jaunty probability that invested her blackest kisses! Imogen's husband was a scorpion to her, ranked among the vermin which she meant to kill for pastime. And she purposed to lull the King into security by "watching, weeping, tendance, kissing," while her poison was vacating his throne. At the last, she only repented that the evils she hatched were not effected, "so, despairing, died," a martyr to an unfulfilled ideal. She is really the Lady Macbeth of the popular conception, being fiendlike from ambition. It would not have been Shakspearean if such a woman had been duplicated to furnish a wife to Macbeth. One hated with all her baffled spite, and the other loved with all her heart, her King.

Shakspeare would have us notice that the clear-sighted Imogen has privately read her step-mother, and lives with suspicions for her constant warders. The King, having banished Posthumus who was secretly married to her, has turned her over to the jailership of the Queen, who tries to cajole her:—

> "No, be assured, you shall not find me, daughter,
> After the slander of most stepmothers,
> Evil-ey'd unto you."

Then she grants the married pair a stolen interview, in order that she may whip out and bring the King in to discover them. She knows the King will be displeased; but she calculates that after his first anger is cooled he will load her with favors to atone for his impetuosity:—

> "I never do him wrong,
> But he does buy my injuries to be friends;
> Pays dear for my offences."

What a capable woman, with this new patent for depleting a husband's pocket by wringing his heart! What an extraordinary endowment of a husband's heart to connect its spasms with the purse-clasp!

Imogen feels the manœuvre of the Queen when she leaves to hurry up the King; and she says to Posthumus, —

> "O dissembling courtesy! How fine this tyrant
> Can tickle where she wounds!"

Why, then, if Shakspeare endowed her with this penetration, does she not at a glance unmask Iachimo when he comes pretending that Posthumus has been false to her in exile, and proffering himself that she may take revenge in kind? Because she has such a heart of trust in her husband that both her ears cannot hastily abuse it. The conflict between Iachimo's counterfeit news and her loyal memory occupies the whole field of her being, and keeps out the base design. She listens to Iachimo with ears attuned by the high praises which her husband sends by letter to introduce a friend "of the noblest note." Iachimo is the creature of her husband's admiration, sent to be admired, suspicion disarmed in advance, not a sentry left on duty before her frankness. His hints of a dishonorable purpose cannot be taken by a mind that is unable to conceive dishonor. So her absolute spotlessness drives him to the plainest speech; for such an artless and unconscious woman never tasked his

lips before. When the revelation comes, like a hideous scrawl of flame across her clear firmament in the very high noon of her confiding, the heaven of purity rains down at once, and there he is, swimming for life in the flood of her disdain. Then he saw womanhood in one "awe-inspiring gaze" that might have prompted Shelley to exclaim, —

> "Her beams anatomize me, nerve by nerve,
> And lay me bare, and make me blush to see
> My hidden thoughts."

What an angelic impossibility of hearing is Imogen's! She has nothing that ever dreamed to itself of the covert meaning of his words. Without a second's interval of parley, not even time enough for natural astonishment, one peremptory instant annihilates his hope.

It is not every woman, even of the irreproachable kind, who wields so prompt a lightning of her chastity. And here Shakspeare has marked the difference between unconsciousness and prudery. I think that Isabella would have understood Iachimo much earlier, for the matter of her virtue was constantly in her thoughts, as a thing to be guarded against an undermining world. Her indignation is voluble; and she undertakes to reason in a priggish fashion with Angelo. But Imogen simply calls her servant that Iachimo may be taken in an instant out of the room. Many a woman whose life has been without a stain is still less intolerant than Isabella, and more complaisant than Imogen. Race and climate are largely implicated in these natural differences.

When Madame de Sévigné heard of her husband's infidelities, it was through the interested malice of her cousin, Bussy-Rabutin, who was in love with her. He proposed that she should seek to be revenged: "I will go halves in your revenge; for, after all, your interests are as dear to me as my own." She quietly replied: "I am not so exasperated as you think."

Iachimo said, —

> "Revenge it.
> I dedicate myself to your sweet pleasure,
> And will continue fast to your affection."

Imogen's white-heat of honor shrivels up the wit of the French lady. Her mind can make but one motion, to cry out, "What ho, Pisanio!"

> "Away! — I do contemn mine ears, that have
> So long attended thee."

Thou dost solicit a lady

> "That disdains
> Thee and the devil alike."

Iachimo now pretends that he was only making trial of her by a false report and by a counterfeited overture, — and all for the sake of the love he bore her husband. This is quite enough: her frankness returns as suddenly as it was dismissed. For, as Iachimo well said, —

> "The gods made you,
> Unlike all others, chaffless."

And that is a statement of the limit placed by Nature to her womanly shrewdness of observation.

In the historical dramas, Shakspeare seldom intro-

duces women in order to make them convey to us impressions of character, traits of mind or heart. They are not so much feminine shapes as persons implicated in the play by the accident of relationship to the men. The parts are not particularized by them. Lady Percy, with one or two light touches of eager inquisitiveness, hints her fond and simple love. Queen Katherine fills out the proportions of a pathetic figure. But in "Henry V." Mrs. Quickly monopolizes all the point and savor: the Queen of France and her daughter are only lay-figures of the plot. In "1, 2 Henry IV.," it is the same. In "Richard II." the Queen seems merely born to this, —

> "That my sad look
> Should grace the triumph of great Bolingbroke."

And her gardener plants a bank of rue

> "In the remembrance of a weeping queen."

But, in "King John" both the grief and the character of Constance are more personally set forth, and we become aware of her distinctive quality. Queen Katherine, in "Henry VIII.," also puts an accent, different from that of Constance, upon her misfortunes; and her grief reveals another mood of the feminine nature; so that she attains to a separate consideration.

None of the women in the historical plays stand by the side of the men so emphasized as the mother of Arthur is: she agitates his claims with an impetuous sincerity that ought to have kept him alive to reign.

A high-minded man who claims his rights, and a high-

minded woman who does the same, express themselves in different styles. The feminine style is shown in Constance with great discrimination. Both sexes can hate injustice, and may be opposed to compromises. Both can have indignation for a crime. But see how Constance puts into these moral feelings a scorn and a swiftness of dissent, urged by a volubility more native to a woman than to a man. Woman is apt, indeed, to be too voluble: each minute of her phrases breeds new ones; so she does not stop to notice that her indictment is shorter than her breath. Therefore men are apt to notice and to complain that her indictment does not reach up to the tide-mark of her breath. But the invective of Constance is the swift weapon-play of maternity: it flashes through every guard, touches rapidly to and fro, and draws blood at every unexpected touch.

A man's moral disposition has not been nourished and toned by the additional organs which impose wifehood and motherhood upon a woman. In her, more nerve centres are involved, with an exquisite sensibility for pain and pleasure which the average man's life seldom reaches. His bosom is not ample enough to contain such throbs of acquiescence or revolt. Every fount of feeling is twinned in woman, and sweet as the milk is, mingled by love, so sharp and bitter is its flavor made by hate. Her nerves revenge the violence of acts which she supposes dishonorable: she can fight with glances more searching and words more unequivocal than the cooler man will furnish. No doubt that his disdains, too, can summon all his blood to blush and lower magnificently

on the cheek. But her blood seems richer in the red corpuscles: it wins, therefore, and is more visited by, the air of heaven. There is no blush so daunting, no look so penetrating to dissolve, no silence of a surprised conscience so unanswerable. And when she grieves, it seems as if the eyes were re-enforced, for all the founts of motherhood are weeping.

This ability to vindicate the right and to repudiate the wrong can easily become absurd to the spectators when it is charged with some excess of temper. Literature does ample justice to the termagant vein, and shows that it is ludicrous because it devotes a high degree of choler to a low measure of affront. In pantomimes, an enormous gun is pointed toward the audience, with extravagant anticipation of its exploit on the faces of the performers. For a moment we are cowed, but laughter fills the vast space between the faint puff and the noise we expected.

I presume that Xantippe felt justified in making the home of Socrates so unpleasant that he preferred the market, the forum, and the leather-dresser's shop, because she thought he neglected her for all those places, and wasted time, and kept her drudging, while he ran to find men and make their coarse grain revolve to sharpen his soul's edge against it. Perhaps, as Socrates was famed for falling into brown studies, which sometimes lasted all day, with contempt for food, it was a case of chronic absence of mind on the subject of dinner; for that is as vital as *τὸ πρεπόν καὶ καλὸν*, the ethically proper and the beautifully true; and no household can

dispense with it, — in fact, children cry for it. Perhaps he supped many a time upon the hemlock of her tongue, and became so acclimated to the draught that the last cup in prison tasted sweetly.

Shakspeare shows the exaggeration of the protesting temper in woman by means of the little spat between Queen Eleanor and Constance, in ii. 7.

A woman's language becomes exacerbated because she is so inadequate to protest by actions. The weakness rolls itself into a bristling defence of words. Men do not drip so profusely into words because they are reservoirs of force and competency. They know that by fair means or foul they can effect purposes from which women are debarred by seclusion, strangeness of habit, and innate reserve. Among women there is a certain resentment at this civic and social disability which does not stint expression.

When, however, a noble woman with a level countenance repudiates an unjust charge, she transfers herself from the bar to the bench, and unseats her summoners. Their purpose quails before this innocence that is so weak, yet grows so overpowering, as in the beauty of Madame Roland and the prison-blanched majesty of Marie Antoinette. The rebuke pulls down the accuser's eyes from their threat, and they seem to go wandering into corners furtively for refuge. Joan of Arc burns in court before the deluded men who claim her as an imp of witchcraft have time to pile their fagots: the passionless chastity gives out blinding sparks when thus enforced; the cheeks of by-standers are reached by

them and set aglow. No man who has been unjustly dealt with, and selected for foul practice, can reach such palsying dignity of behavior that turns the axe's edge or holds the arm suspended in mid-resolve. There is a high manly scorn which is beyond refuting: it can kindle admiration in unwilling minds, and compel baseness to pause and to confer. But woman's beauty, planted in the breastplate of an untainted heart, becomes a petrifying image; and whoso meets the ruthless look will remember it even in the moment of a consummated revenge. Nothing helps bad men at such a sight but the poor subterfuge of flying into a rage, as if to muster in that way momentum enough to huddle her off, to get her where the condemning head shall fall before its eyes or lips can utter another protest. They shear it at the neck, never reflecting that they thus untether it to range in other skies, to unkennel heaven sleuth-hounds at last and drag them down.

> "I will instruct my sorrows to be proud:
> For grief is proud, and makes his owner stoop.
> To me, and to the state of my great grief,
> Let kings assemble: for my grief's so great
> That no supporter but the huge firm earth
> Can hold it up: here I and sorrow sit;
> Here is my throne, bid kings come bow to it."

LORD BACON AND THE PLAYS:

SHAKSPEARE'S WOMEN:

LOVE IN SHAKSPEARE.

LORD BACON AND THE PLAYS.

A CONSIDERATION of the theory that Lord Bacon wrote the plays which are attributed to Shakspeare comes in here more conveniently, because it will appear that Bacon's knowledge of women and his experience of the passion of Love, as expressed in his works, are so meagre and so colorless when contrasted with the plays that the fact might stand alone, with scarce a comment, to refute the theory which is so elaborately defended. In its proper place this will appear. In the mean time, some notice may be taken of a few points of the theory which seem to have gained a recognition so far as to produce scepticism in many intelligent minds.

Books enough are published in various languages filled with preternaturally far-fetched conjectures concerning Shakspeare. Many of them are devoted to proving that he must have been brought up to this or that profession. Lord Campbell has shown the extent of the poet's knowledge of legal terms, and his aptness in placing them. A surgeon claims him on the ground of his knowledge of the technical terms used in medical art. Bucknill and others, on the same ground of technical knowledge, prove that he must have been trained as a mad-doctor. A musician refers to his love of music, botanists to his accuracy in grouping flowers according

to their seasons, and Hastings is convinced that he was bred a bird-fancier. Each investigator discovers his own specialty in the teeming pages, and insists upon apprenticing the poet. The doctor points to the line in "Hamlet," —

> "And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee," —

and asks, with an air of conviction, how any one at that period, who had not been bred to the profession, could have understood the ginglymoid structure of the knee! The Worshipful Master of the Bard-of-Avon Lodge claims masonic fraternity with him, thinking that allusions to masonic terms and customs are scattered through the plays, but chiefly on the strength of Hubert's words in "King John," —

> "They shake their heads,
> And whisper one another in the ear,
> And he that speaks doth grip the hearer's wrist;"

for that action is the symbol of the sublime degree! Dr. Farmer anchored his theory that Shakspeare was in his youth, and during the unaccounted-for years after he left Stratford, a sharpener and dealer in skewers, upon these lines from "Hamlet:" —

> "There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will."

These skewers were of the kind then used to fasten bales of wool. But Hugh Miller, who began life as a stone-cutter, finds in those lines a clear indication that the poet was bred to be a stone-mason! And at last a practical printer by the name of Blades proves that he worked at the printer's trade; for he speaks about

"printing kisses" and the print of hoofs. In "Love's Labor Lost" is the clause, "I will do it, sir, in print;" and in the "Winter's Tale," "I love a ballad in print." Blades even apprentices him to the printer Vantrollier, who at the time enjoyed the monopoly of printing a certain class of books. Up to the present date, the number of professions and employments to which Shakspeare was trained amounts to twenty-four. No doubt some one is preparing to show that he must have been a fishmonger, and the lines which invite his attempt are quite as apposite as any of the above: "A fish: he smells like a fish;" "The luce is a fresh fish, the salt-fish is an old coat;" "They are both as whole as a fish;" and, more decisive than all, "The fish lives in the sea." By all means, let us have the sixty-eight allusions to fish and fishing in Shakspeare elaborated into one final theory, that he spent four years on a herring-smack; for how otherwise could the Clown in "Twelfth Night" have told Viola that a pilchard was a big herring?

There is another kind of criticism to which the plays have been subjected that imputes to them all the afterthoughts of later times. Ulrici derives from them an evangelical scheme of Christian ethics; a Roman Catholic claims the poet as an ardent adherent of the Pope; another commentator attributes to Shakspeare a deliberate purpose to write up the Protestant Reformation and write down the Pope, and finds a trace of Shakspeare's contempt for Romanism in "1 Henry IV.," iv. 1, where the troops of the Prince of Wales are described as —

"Glittering in golden coats, like images."

Sievers * thinks that the main thread of all Shakspeare's poetry was the "reproduction out of the nature of man of the Protestant scheme of Christianity"! It is shown particularly in the "Merchant of Venice" and "Hamlet." Tschischwitz's † book is as deterrent as his name. It is an attempt to develop Shakspeare's views upon the relation between ruler and people, — to show that he considered the state and kingdom to rest upon reciprocity of duties and upon the principle of piety. This is only another specimen of the terrific afterthoughts which the Germans force back upon Shakspeare. Gervinus calls him the perfect representative of modern Protestantism; Vischer concluded that he was a Pantheist; Bernays will not allow to him any religion at all; while Dr. Reichensperger, of the German Parliament, gives reasons in his book ‡ for believing that he was an Ultramontanist! And Thomas Tyler, of the University of London, considers that Hamlet was a forerunner of Schopenhauer, and thoroughly pessimistic, because the calamity in the play does not respect personal character, and the future retributions and compensations are not clearly made out! §

* W. Shakspeare, Sein Leben und Dichten dargestellt, 1866, xvi. 534.

† Shakspeare's Staat und Königthum, nachgewiesen aus der Lancaster Tetralogie. 1866.

‡ Shakspeare in Verhältnisz zum Mittelalter und der Gegenwart.

§ We do not forget nor undervalue the labors of Schlegel and Tieck; the dissertation upon "Hamlet" in "Wilhelm Meister;" the admirable contributions through several years to the "Jahrbuch der Shakspeare-Gesellschaft;" the articles in the "Shakspear-Museum" and other Ger-

It would be a dreary business to construct a catalogue of all these modern slights to the memory of Shakspeare. They turn his plays into a system of theology. Some critics declare that his object was to make celibacy ridiculous and marriage honorable; some labor to prove that the plays are treatises upon the Christian doctrines of justification by faith and the salvation of man; some point to his Baconian method of induction; and others reject the whole over-done business of interpretation, because they simply claim for Bacon himself the authorship of all the plays: as if Shakspeare were turned inside out, wrung dry, macerated and dispersed, by two centuries of vigorous comment, and it became necessary to begin operations upon a fresh person. These operations have enriched literature with its most grandiose specimens of futility.

With respect to this last effort of modern criticism, it might suffice with many to repeat an observation made by Lowell, who said that, if any person was disposed to believe that Bacon wrote the plays, he could set himself

man periodicals; the edition of Shakspeare translated by such men as Bodenstedt, Delius, Gildemeister, Herwegh, Heyse, &c., many of them distinguished for poetic talent. The attack by Benedix upon the "Shakspeare mania" has brought out excellent comment from Noiré and Dr. Wagner. Wagner's editions of the plays, with notes and commentary, are good: so is Dr. Jacob Heussi's "Hamlet." The essays of Karl Elze, of E. Hermann, Kreyssig, V. Friesen, Otto Ludwig, and several other contributors to the *Jahrbuch*, cannot be neglected by scholars of Shakspeare: they are sharply distinguished from the dilettante work of Fulda and others, and from the subjective excess of the writers named above in the text. The English lover of Shakspeare cannot afford to indulge an indiscriminate dislike of the German revival. The Shakspeare-Lexicon of Dr. Schmidt is a magnificent piece of work.

right by reading Bacon's paraphrase of the Psalms. One dose of that would settle the supremacy of Shakspeare back upon the seat of reason.

The following verse is a specimen of the average workmanship expended on this paraphrase: —

> "So shall he not lift up his head
> In the assembly of the just.
> For why? The Lord hath special eye
> To be the godly's stay at call;
> And hath given over righteously
> The wicked man to take his fall."

Half a score of lines may be found of a better quality than those above exhibit; but the bad ones have been purposely selected as yielding the only sensible and conclusive test. The writer of the plays could not have been guilty of them. Some things we know to be impossible, — that Sidney should display the white feather; that a gentleman should ever once practise a scurvy trick; that a woman all compact of grace, animate with the instinct of fitness, should ever make a vulgar gesture; that the genius which interfused the plays should ever have gone to rot on the Lethean wharf of those prosaic lines. Nay, the question whether Bacon composed the plays grows pale before a greater one, — If he did compose them, what debility suggested to him this undertaking of the Psalms? There they already stood, in their tender, majestic English, simple as Hamlet's soliloquy and Macbeth's regrets, — a mother-tongue that resents the adulterate touch. We have a right to call upon those who espouse the Baconian theory of the plays to account for the existence of the paraphrase.

Lord Bacon wrote some lines commending the natural defence of an upright conscience. So did Shakspeare. Let us compare them: —

> "The man of life upright, whose guileless heart is free
> From all dishonest deeds and thoughts of vanity;
> The man whose silent days in harmless joys are spent,
> Whom hopes cannot delude nor fortune discontent, —
> That man needs neither towers nor armor for defence,
> Nor secret vaults to fly from thunder's violence."

In the second part of "Henry VI." are found the lines which are memorable to all English-speaking people: —

> "What stronger breast-plate than a heart untainted?
> Thrice is he arm'd that hath his quarrel just;
> And he but naked, though lock'd up in steel,
> Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted."

We have plainly another case of paraphrase to be accounted for; and we can understand why Bacon, who used to send sonnets to Elizabeth to soften her heart towards Essex, should lament, "But I could never prevail with her."

The badness of Bacon's efforts at poetry has suggested to me the possibility that some of the didactic passages in the plays which Shakspeare altered and amended for the theatre, were left as they came from his pen; just as other passages from the playwrights of that day may be found streaking the rich Shakspearean lode, recognized by their inferiority or difference of style, but no longer imputable to the culprits by name. Pages of this un-Shakspearean matter may have drifted from Bacon's pen into the original crudeness of some of the plays, particularly into those which set forth periods of history.

One is tempted to make this surmise serve to explain a famous argument which the Baconians derive from a letter written by a friend to Bacon in acknowledgment of the present of a volume which he had lately published. This friend was Tobie Matthew, a devoted adherent of Bacon, who had done him important service from time to time, and who consequently was frequently saluted with the little pots of incense which Tobie swung adoringly before his patron. Now Bacon wrote him a letter dated the 9th of April, the year not given; but it must have been after January, 1621, because Matthew's reply addresses the Viscount St. Albans, and Bacon did not receive that title previously to the above date. Bacon's letter accompanied a copy of a volume. Matthew's reply acknowledges this "great and noble token" of his "lordship's favor." And the Baconians claim that this token was the Folio of the Plays, published in 1623; and they point triumphantly to the postscript to Matthew's letter, which runs thus: "The most prodigious wit that ever I knew of my nation, and of this side of the sea, is of your lordship's name, though he be known by another;" that is to say, a few intimate friends, like Matthew, knew perfectly well that Bacon wrote the plays, but suffered them, for prudential reasons, to appear under the name of Shakspeare, who doubtless had some hand in them. The temptation is, I say, to account for that postscript by supposing that Matthew was acquainted with those inferior passages which may have strayed into the plays from the pen of Bacon, that he appraised them with the

judgment of a toady, and exaggerated their quantity as well as quality. This method for breaking the force of Matthew's postscript I reject, for the simple reason that it is not only strained, but superfluous; for Bacon published his "History of Henry VII." in March, 1622, the "De Augmentis" in October, 1623, and the "Apothegms" in December, 1624. One of these books, probably the first of them, and the first which Matthew had received from Bacon since he was made Viscount St. Albans, was sent; and Matthew took the first opportunity to flatter Bacon with his title in connection with his genius, saying in the postscript, "A most prodigious wit is my friend Bacon, though he now passes by the other designation as Viscount St. Albans."

It is alleged that Bacon did not wish to be reputed a poet, lest his preferment and prospects at the Court should be impaired. It seems to me that he needed not to dread the imputation of having written poems. Veins of a lively fancy run through the prose of his great treatises, and he was largely endowed with the scientific imagination; but his verses are dry as a remainder biscuit. The divine art was not in those days imputed to any man on such pretences.

One advocate of the Baconian theory thinks that the poems of "Lucrece" and "Adonis" were dedicated to Southampton, under the name of Shakspeare, as an arranged and designed cover for the real author. But why, supposing this, was Shakspeare selected as the cover? A man selected for such a purpose must have been deemed by contemporaries competent to have

written the poems, else there could have been no cover in using his name.

Did Ben Jonson, who was intimate with Bacon, know the secret of the authorship of the plays, and thus know that the manuscripts in use among the players must have been copies, and yet say, in praise of Shakspeare, "I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honor to Shakspeare, that in writing (whatever he penned) he never blotted out a line"? Jonson could never have written so in the secret conviction that Shakspeare did not compose the lines, some of which Jonson *wished he had* blotted.

With respect to the saying which was common among the players, the following points deserve consideration: First, it may have been a generalization carelessly made by admiring friends and comrades; second, what did they really know about it? They only saw the acting copies made for the theatre whose property they were. They knew nothing about Shakspeare's preliminary sketches and studies, the first drafts, the tentative outlines and passages. Third, the total absence of suspicion among them that he did not write the plays, but only copied them from some unknown author's manuscript, is unaccountable. Every probability would be against it. Among the players who knew Shakspeare, saw his daily life, computed how and where he spent his time, gauged him as a companion and a wit, such a secret would soonest leak out and spread all over London, or his reputed authorship would be soonest exploded and treated as a joke. For they and Jonson best knew the man.

And this probability was not rebutted by Lord Palmerston, when, alluding to Jonson's remarks, he jauntily said, "Oh, these fellows will always stand up for each other!" for what reasons existed for protecting Shakspeare by reticence or by elaborate lying?

In the discussion, which has lately been renewed, upon the authorship of the plays, the points which are chiefly relied on by the Baconians are these: 1. The plays are *too great*, and out of all proportion to the obscurity which rests upon Shakspeare's life, and to the insignificance of his contemporary fame. 2. They are filled with all kinds of classical allusion, professional information, legal, medical, horticultural, scientific, to an extent which an obscure play actor could not possibly comprise within the limits of his ragged and scanty education. 3. The plays contain remarkable parallelisms with passages in Bacon's works, and coincidences of thought and expression.

These are the points of chief consequence which claim the plays for Bacon. To the critics who make this claim it is wonderful that one man from Stratford, so little known and prized, of whom no account of education and career survives, should have sent down to posterity, side by side with the great works of Bacon, compositions which are parallel in greatness and abreast of them in fame. They are too great for any one man of that epoch, unless that man be the greatest and wisest of his day. But how much more wonderful is the problem which, by implication, these critics set before us, — namely, to account for the fact that Bacon should have

produced not only Shakspeare, a miracle for one mind, but himself besides! It taxes the resource of miracle less sharply to refer the plays back again to Shakspeare.

For which shall we prefer? To accredit Bacon with the authorship because he knew all the law and science which the plays include; or to accredit Shakspeare with it because he possessed all the poetic flow, imagery, and plastic art, all the passion and humor, which the plays include? Of the two sets of endowments, which could have resulted in the plays? Not the first without the second. But the second, then, being absolutely essential, must make the first to be also an essential accessory, whether we can or cannot account for the possessorship of it by Shakspeare. Because we can, from the published writings of Bacon, derive the fact that, however poetic his prose may sometimes be, and fertile in apposite wit and fancy, it does not supply the peculiar imagination, and, least of all, the genial sense of humor, which reigns through all the plays. If the more important qualities be impossible to Bacon, a sufficient accessory acquaintance with terms of law, facts of science, and scraps of classic learning may not be impossible to Shakspeare.

Let us ask, too, would Bacon have taken the risk of writing for the theatre? His relations with the Queen, his desires for office and persistent struggles to attain it, his exigency to keep a clean record with the Cecils and his other jealous rivals, are supposed to have been the motives for concealing his authorship. The opinion

of public circles would have tainted him with the "vulgar scandal" of being a playwright. No doubt it would, and have effectually barred advancement. For he was known, watched, dreaded, appraised, opposed by too many people. His secret would not have waited two centuries for another Bacon to discover. How much worse for the aspiring statesman would have been an exposed concealment. The more exacting the motive for concealment appears, the more exacting appears the motive for doing nothing that required concealment.

All which Bacon did for the Court, from a politic disposition, in getting up masques and entertainments, was openly done. The labored and jejune speeches, and other matters, which he prepared for masques, have come down to us. He could be tolerated in this, and not in writing for the theatre, because a writer of plays could not wrest from public opinion the grave and stately responsibilities which he was eager to assume. Other lawyers of the day wrote for the stage; but they were not born in the line of England's chancellors.

And in those days the emoluments of a playwright were too trifling to attract a man like Bacon, who managed to keep himself so deeply in debt that once, at least, he breathed the air of a spunging-house. Nothing but place, retainers, royal donations of rented estates, and official fees, could save him from the money-lenders.

As it is supposed that Shakspeare was not well acquainted with the Latin writers, we are asked to account for the appearance of classical quotations in

the plays from writers who had not yet been translated. In the "Taming of the Shrew," iii. 7, there is one from Ovid's Epistles. If Bacon wrote the play, we may suppose that he quoted directly from Ovid. Then why, in Act i. 1 of the same play, did he not quote a Latin line directly from Terence, instead of taking it from Lily's Grammar where the quotation is not correct? And suppose Shakspeare never did nor could read Ovid: it was easy enough for him to pick up those two lines for the fun in iii. 1, even if we reject the opinion that attributes large portions of an earlier form of the play to Marlowe. If Shakspeare only knew Latin through Lily's Grammar, he might have taken Terence from it; but Bacon's scholarship was above that.

A large part of the plot of the "Comedy of Errors" was drawn from the *Menæchmi* of Plautus, a play which Bacon frequently quotes. On the supposition that Shakspeare was unacquainted with it, we easily account for his knowledge of the plot. A previous play, called the "Historie of Error," acted in 1577, was derived from the same comedy of Plautus; and William Warner's translation of it was freely handed about in manuscript for some time before the appearance of the "Comedy of Errors," though it was not entered at Stationers Hall till June, 1594.*

There is a curious parallelism between the fourth scene of Act iv. of the "Winter's Tale," where Perdita shows her tender knowledge of flowers, and Bacon's

* Fleay's "Shakspeare Manual," p. 25, a most serviceable book.

Essay on Gardens which was not printed till 1625. So it appears that both men were acquainted with the same facts concerning the succession of flowers through the months of the year. And there is nothing strange in that; for the flowers took their same times to bloom for Shakspeare in Stratford as they did for Bacon near London, or in the retreats of Gorhambury. But it is only enough to contrast the exquisite lines of Perdita with Bacon's cataloguing prose, in which not one epithet save "pale" and "yellow" appears, to feel quite sure that the flowers breathed no charm into Bacon's fancy.

> "O Proserpina,
> For the flowers now, that, frighted, thou let'st fall
> From Dis's wagon! daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty; violets, dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
> Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
> That die unmarried, ere they can behold
> Bright Phœbus in his strength."

If precious articles at public vendue — Gobelins, rare Palissys, Majolicas, and Sèvres ware — happen to tally with an auctioneer's list of the sale, does it seem quite credible that they were all the production of the auctioneer? "Merciful, wonder-making Heaven!" What a myriad-minded auctioneer!

Indeed, does any one dare to say that Shakspeare and Bacon did not compare notes upon many subjects? Many of the reputed parallelisms are indirect traces of such an intercourse; and it is not a sufficient objection that Shakspeare is nowhere mentioned by Bacon. Neither are Spenser and Marlowe; and we know that he

was acquainted with Ben Jonson. Did Ben Jonson and Shakspeare never go to Gray's Inn together? Shakspeare helped Johnson to write his tragedy of "Sejanus;" and the latter was frequently with Bacon during the period of composition? I love to think, as it cannot be disproved, that Shakspeare met high themes of speculation, Nature's curious secrets, and choice allusions of learning, amid the books and apparatus of the philosopher, where problems dear to both these men were discussed. Such an intercourse as this, which varied his close companionship with Essex and Southampton, would be quite sufficient to account for the coincidences which support the Baconian theory: there is, for instance, the passage in "Troilus and Cressida" that puts into Hector's mouth a queer bit of didactic anachronism. Reproving Paris and Troilus, he says, —

> "You have both said well;
> And on the cause and question now in hand
> Have gloz'd, — but superficially; not much
> Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought
> Unfit to hear moral philosophy."

Aristotle really alluded to "political philosophy;" and when we find that Bacon made the same mistake in his "Advancement of Learning," printed before the play, we think we can see that book in Shakspeare's hand, or overhear with him the error lapsing in the flow of conversation. But perhaps the passage which includes it was one of the parts of "Troilus and Cressida" which did not proceed from Shakspeare's pen. Certainly there was not poetic license enough in Bacon's mind to plant a seaport in Bohemia, and make Aristotle a contem-

porary of the Trojans. Neither would he have affronted his historical sense and hurt his reputation as a scholar by importing into "Henry VI.," and attributing to Jack Cade and his followers, the socialistic doctrine and mad behavior which Holingshed shows to have belonged to Wat Tyler in the reign of Richard II. It is also strange that the scholar, Bacon, should have put into the mouth of a person in "Coriolanus," i. 4, line 57, that allusion to Cato, —

> "Thou wast a soldier
> Even to Cato's wish."

M. Porcius Cato was born B.C. 234: the play belongs to B.C. 490. And if anybody knew when Galen was born, A.D. 130, it was Bacon; yet Menenius, in the same play, ii. 1, line 128, says, "The most sovereign prescription in Galen is but empiricutic." But Shakspeare's main object was to write a play, and co-ordinate his groups. So he paired off his characteristics with each other to gratify the poetic exigency of the play, and not always to render strict tribute to the Muse of History.

Can anybody positively deny that Shakspeare stole away from the Mermaid more often then his fellow-actors and poets relished, to spend the evening with Essex at Gray's Inn, perhaps while Bacon was busy upon his "Characters of Julius and Augustus Cæsar" in 1607–8, — for not long after that the famous tragedy appeared; perhaps to urge him with the happy suggestions of friendship to write his Defence of Shakspeare's own dear Essex? There was, indeed, that "semblable coherence" between the spirits of the phi-

losopher and the poet which qualified them to be mutual instructors; and the mobile and apprehensive intellect of the poet could absorb without books the thoughts that filled the air round Bacon's head. The structure of Shakspeare, open at every pore to every influence, was pervaded with the conversations of his age: the interchange made a thoroughfare of him; and, as it passed, he detained all the nutriment that his imagination craved, and let the rest escape. He lived amid this impromptu wit and knowledge of illustrious friends, saturated with their atmosphere, passing it through the deep-breathing lungs to redden, and transmitting it by magnificent pulses to the hearts of his spectators, purged of superfluity, sweetened by gentleness, drenched in grace. By every sense, with the nerves of every touch, he appropriated character, love, theory, and life. London was library and university; and poetic intuition was the tutor of his soul. So — whether jesting at the Mermaid, and growing forgetive upon the sack; visiting the haunts of travellers and mariners to pick up strange tales; listening to the multifarious comment of a Bacon, and turning over his rarities of books; or lounging by the river-side with Southampton, the centre of a group of the most advanced, curious, brilliant men of the Elizabethan age — he became, in person, the coincidence which pervades the dramas; and all inquisitions upon the amount of literary culture which he achieved, or surmises about his earlier employments, become impertinent, if they are not made ridiculous, as his great, receptive, broad-domed soul covered over London's world and drew up its variety.

There is a kindred gift in Robert Browning, which makes its confession thus: —

> "If we have souls, know how to see and use,
> One place performs, like any other place,
> The proper service every place on earth
> Was framed to furnish man with; serves alike
> To give him note that, through the place he sees,
> A place is signified he never saw,
> But, if he lack not soul, may learn to know."

The soul of the true artist being cosmopolitan, any place can become the centre of his circumference; for he is already outside of the world which his neighborhood is too little to embrace. Perhaps his neighbors are penurious step-dames who make scanty provision for emotion, and detest passionate experiences of every kind. But his imagination cannot starve. It implies all "the pomp and circumstance of glorious" life, just as the genius of creation involved and anticipated ourselves, who dress for it a perpetual banquet though no man sees it feeding, and none offer it their alms. The artist's soul transmutes the refuse of factories, the sweepings of coal, bone-parings, and street-scraps into the brilliant colors which, like clarions, precede Beauty's procession and summon the spectators.

If Lord Bacon wrote the plays, he must have conceived the female characters which invest them with such dignity and graciousness. To have done that required a comprehension of the varieties of the female disposition, such as could be derived only from personal contact and experience. To have seized some broad features of the plays, Bacon must have been acquainted

with many degrees of social state beneath his own. We can trust Shakspeare in the tavern and its purlieus as frankly as we would the Persian poets, Saadi and Omer Khayam, who saw in the full cup a symbol of the divine afflatus. But we cannot imagine that Bacon was a frequenter of those London haunts where Dick the Butcher took his ale before Jack Cade decreed that the three-hooped pot should have ten hoops, and made it felony to drink small-beer; where Falstaff leered and tossed his ballast over in a sea of sack; where Parolles vapored, and Bardolph blushed, and Pistol's English grew tipsy; where Sir Andrew and Sir Toby roared catches, and Feste and the other clowns made excellent fooling into the small hours; where Bottom mildly exhaled at the head of the table at which Flute, Snout, and Starveling took their pots after the shop-shutters were up; where Dame Quickly maundered, and Mistress Overdone and Doll Tearstreet made largess of their brassy smiles. A poet may convert the tavern-bench into a wool-sack: "This chair shall be my state, this dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my crown." But a Queen's Solicitor and future Lord Chancellor could not risk pawning the wool-sack for a tavern-bench. Even the gift of poetry would not have so badly endangered his prospects.

Bacon knew the wives and daughters of his friends and associates. He was at home in the families of the Pakingtons and Barnhams and Hattons. He doubtless noted the peculiarities of Lady Rich, Mistress Vernon, Elizabeth Throckmorton, and the other women of that crowd upon the steps of the throne. So many of

these were cast in the same mould, that he would have been meagrely provided with female types, leaving us unable to account for the great range of character which fills the scene, from awkward Audrey to queenly Hermione, from Mistress Overdone to Imogen, from the Pander's wife to Marina, from Phebe to Perdita.

Moreover, search Bacon's writings upon this matter of knowledge of woman to find, if you can, hints and passages which are parallel with the plays in temper or language. Look for traces of that fervor which devotes the plays to the great central passion, and consecrates them with so many moods and styles of womanhood. Ransack his letters in vain for any deep consciousness of sex like that which makes every play personal and vital with something that cannot be put aside. Read his Essay on Love, and contrast its dry, pragmatic tone with the pages which palpitate with Juliet, or those over which Viola tenderly broods and Helena frankly shines. Can we imagine that essay to have been a treasured favorite of Desdemona, or to have beguiled Ophelia during the absence of her prince, or to have served Cleopatra except to hang on Antony's hook for a sinker, as for jest she hung the salted cod? Isabella might have safely furnished a copy of it to every nun in her convent; but Imogen, for all her "pudency so rosy," would not have taken it to bed with her, to read three hours and fold down the leaf where she left off. The warmest expression which Bacon was ever overheard to make is preserved in a speech in praise of love, written probably for a masque. The speaker says: "In the

melting of a horse-shoe, can a mighty dead fire do as much as a small fire blown? In shaping metals, can a mighty huge weight do as much as a blow? It is motion, therefore, that animateth all things: it is vain to think that any strength of Nature can countervail a violent motion. Now, affections are the motions of the soul. Let no man fear the yoke of fortune that's in the yoke of love."

But the details which defend the Baconian theory are too numerous to be met and properly treated unless one had a volume's space at disposal. Each one is trivial; and the total effect of the theory depends upon a nice and patient construction of a cumulative argument, such as lawyers know how to use. Probably the majority of adherents to the theory will come from the legal profession, or from the class of minds that is trained to appreciate the importance of all the little points of some routine. But so long as the court before which this case is argued must have for judge a quick perception of the exigencies of the imagination, which include the delicacy that tests differences of intellectual structure and the broadness that adopts all vices, passions, whims, and humors, the details need not be separately pursued: their refutation, if still possible, is anticipated and made useless by the comprehensive verdict of an imagination that is kindred to the plays.

It is not entirely just to say that the contributions of men who favor the theory are specimens of literary futility. They are frequently valuable to the scholar of Shakspeare by throwing unexpected side-lights upon

the plays: they also furnish suggestions to the interpreter. They have amassed a quantity of collateral information of Shakspeare's epoch which the critic will thankfully acknowledge as he uses it. The minute and laborious research which Judge Holmes has expended upon his volume, the literary, historical, and social parallelisms which he discloses, the philosophy and style of thinking of Elizabeth's age, put the lover of Shakspeare under obligation.

SHAKSPEARE'S WOMEN.

For many years before the time of Shakspeare, it had been customary upon the continent to assign to women the female characters of plays. But we do not find any trace of the employment of women upon the English stage till 1632. It is a mistake of Colley Cibber that no actresses had been seen on the stage previous to the Restoration. A French company that included women appeared in a play at Blackfriars in 1629, and were soundly hissed for this innovation upon British prejudice. In 1641, during the Puritan interdiction of plays, the actors drew up their "Stage-players' Complaint," — "Our boys, ere we shall have liberty to act again, will be grown out of use, like cracked organ-pipes, and have faces as old as our plays." In 1660, a play was acted entirely by men. In 1661, the same play was acted with the help of female actors. After women had effected a lodgement upon the English stage, they still

divided for a while with men the female characters. But, during the life of Shakspeare, squeaking tongues and downy cheeks used to "boy" the greatness of his female parts.

We can understand how this custom must have helped both the audience and the actors through the frequently broad dialogue of the coarsest plays of that period, where things and situations are mentioned with a frankness and precision which cannot now possibly be reproduced, except in the sugar-coated fashion of the Offenbachian revival. Women wore masks when they attended the theatre, and needed not to be at the expense of blushing. The slight disguise lent to them the illusion of being neuters in the crowd. The world was then unsqueamish and forced no scruples on the playwrights, whose coarseness differed from Shakspeare's in being lugged in for its own sake. His plots always countenance his freedom and adopt it. There is Shakspearean motive for every wanton page, as there is, too, genius in it, which other writers could not ape nor rival. Each feeling is so essential to the intercourse of his characters that he cannot disguise it: it is a state of nature that gambols like a child among its elders, more likely to be smiled at than reproved. The texts of the poet's frankness survive, but not as deliberate outrages to the modern womanhood which would fain not speak nor hear them; and they do not justify the expurgated editions which unfix them from their natural connections with the chastity and married honor involved on every page and in the drift of every play.

When his plots disguise female characters in the dress of boys and pages, it was more effectively done because his actors, thus resuming their natural mien, could so easily sustain the dramatic contrivance with the advantages of sex. And this is something which our modern female actors cannot imitate. At least, they do not appear to be interested to make the attempt, because they are misled by vanity to set off their little rounded waists and the feminine charm of figure and movements. Perhaps it is not vanity, but an instinct of womanhood, which lays this embargo on her mimic power.

An exception must be made of Mrs. Kean; for a play was always the thing to catch her conscience, and engage it to lend the utmost reality to the scene. As Wilford, in the "Iron Chest," she never forgot to assume the perfect stride and motion of a man; and as the disguised Viola, when the thought hit her that Olivia had fallen in love with her, she slapped her cap, and threw out her right leg with all the jauntiness of a boy, as she exclaimed, "I am the man!"

But, in general, the figure, gait, and instinctive movements of the actress continually betray the Imogen, the Viola, the Jessica, the Julia, the Rosalind, who may well say, "I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel, and to cry like a woman." Portia says to Nerissa, —

> "I'll hold thee any wager,
> When we are both accoutred like young men,
> I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,
> And wear my dagger with the braver grace;

> And speak, between the change of man and boy,
> With a reed voice; and turn two mincing steps
> Into a manly stride."

But, when Shakspeare's smooth youngsters reassumed their characters as women, how the great poet must have been inwardly fretted with the incongruous presentation of the tone of masculinity in each passion, of the boy's smutch on the bloom of each emotion, the elbows wearing ragged holes through delicate sentiment, the scraggy shoulders and strong collar-bones working out of every tender phrase! He was forced to see a Cleopatra without "the entire and sinuous wealth of the shining shape" that held

> "A soul's predominance
> I' the head so high and haught, except one thievish glance,
> From back of oblong eye, intent to count the slain."

It was Antony's Egypt without the fine malice and insinuation, stripped of the abjectness of her love which, grovelling for pardon at having wrecked her lord, makes him arrest her heart again to indemnify him for all his fortunes that had gone to pieces; as he answers to her cry for pardon, —

> "Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates
> All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss;
> Even this repays me."

Could all Shakspeare's training have infected a boy's imagination with Juliet's ardent frankness, which tipped those lines with the sparkle of first love, and launched it from the balcony into the night, to be one star the more? And what boy or man could have returned to

Shakspeare that motherhood of scorn which whitened the lip of Constance, — could have picked up and handed back to him the gauntletted verses of her defiance? His imagination must have wilted in that dryness of the actors; it was a limbo for the infants of his soul, out of which they never graduated: the tender grace of Perdita, doting over flowers as if they had natural instincts like her own, which ought not to be dismissed but rather claimed; the moan of distracted Ophelia, using flowers for tokens; the airy coquetries of Beatrice and Rosalind; the concealment preying on the bud of Viola's cheek; the gathering madness discharged in showers of pity on Cordelia's; the fell chastity of eye which made Iachimo's looks peruse the ground. All the distinctive temperament in the gestures, tones, allusions, of Shakspeare's women; all the difference of sex to which the verses strive to connect each emotion as it rises, to hold it a moment on the face, to detain it in the eyes, to send it scurrying by; that struggle of shyness with desire, the tremor of a heart that has a secret threatening to climb into sight, the anxious reticence that reaches to pull it down; the love that whets itself upon ambition's stone to the point of murder, and makes its hands of one color with the husband's; the swaying, queenly gait, the sinuous arms that would embrace when words were done, as Hermione descends slowly from the pedestal; the impromptu charm of Miranda's modesty when she would not wish any companion in the world but Ferdinand; the reverie of Desdemona, as she unpinned her dress to the tune of "Willow, willow, willow," and

started at the wind, thinking it was Othello's knock, expectant but bodeful, — all the generic traits which differentiate Shakspeare's women from all the other women of literature, according as women themselves naturally furnish those traits, could never have been personated by any man.

How fortunate it is for a grateful posterity that it has been enabled to repay to Shakspeare a portion of its heavy debt to him, by committing his female characters to women of various talents and temperaments, some of whom are the brightest offspring of their age! Could he have foreseen, when the women of his fancy were consigned to the beardless tenors of London, that the true woman would eventually route these wretched eunuchs, claim the scene, appropriate her own verse, and infuse the whole unsuspected genius of her sex into his conceptions, to give them new births in the travailing of her bright endowments? That was a perfect forecast of the imagination which, with only youths for actors, whose chief advantage was the callowness upon the cheek, could have written the parts which have laid an attachment upon the finest women of the last two hundred years, and taxed all their passion, wile, and infinite variety. He must have written in a divining sense that Nature, piqued by the revelations of her deepest mystery, would have to summon at length its representatives to mediate, and, taking these things of heaven, show them unto men.

In some respects, the conceptions of Shakspeare have not found the later actors and actresses to be profitable

allies, in so far as they have put a private stamp upon their favorite characters, and have levied duty upon his fancy that prefers free-trade even to direct dealing clear of middlemen with every heart. So does every sect hang over the great stream of the Bible, see its own face reflected there, and languish for it. Shakspeare's pages surprise actors with their own temperament, and make them long to embody it. So that our Shakspearean impressions are decided for us, and descend to our children through the style or school of great histrionic families, in the same way that congenital traits travel out of the past into the future: the traditional studies of great theatrical performers propagate themselves. Their excellences cannot be ignored, and they quite plausibly vindicate themselves as pure Shakspearean intentions. We accept these renderings, and soon become disturbed to have them challenged and displaced. It is a great but willing tribute which we pay to the genius of the artist when we confide the imagination of Shakspeare to his interpretations; just as we despatch our diamond to be ground and set. He sends it back to us flashing from facets which describe his individual skill.

But, in consequence of this genial submission of the spectator to the impressive portraiture, there arises a prejudice that Shakspeare could not have conceived otherwise, and that the character cannot and ought not to be repealed. In this way, for instance, some famous women have accustomed us to a Lady Macbeth who is full of grandeur, in whose solid and sombre person a suppressed cruelty smoulders. The verses protrude like

claws of tigers; they clutch and rend: you may expect to overhear the lapping. The lower jaw of this conception is too square: the teeth of it are too relentlessly closed upon a victim. There is not an unoccupied space on cheek or brow where love can colonize; for all the space is pre-empted by a ravin to glut a lust for power. The woman's husband is only a lackey who must be whipped with scorpion phrases up to the deed that makes a queen of her. She detects a flavor of the milk of human kindness in him; and it makes her scowl till she shrieks to have the ministers of darkness turn her own milk to gall. She is the woman to carry back the daggers with the bluff composure of a butcher, and hoping to find that Duncan still bleeds, so that she may gild the faces of the grooms. You would not come upon her rampaging at midnight with a candle, rubbing at imaginary stains, and conning her secrets with fixed glassy eyes; for she is firmly constructed to know the blessedness of a bed and the balm of being conscienceless. Of such a wife Macbeth might well have said, "She should have died hereafter;" but she would not have found any time at all for such a weakness. I cannot discover the Lady Macbeth of Shakspeare in this too robust delineation.

Another kind of misrepresentation has issued from another quarter whence it should have been least expected. Some of the noblest women of modern times have filed a complaint against Shakspeare's women, and brought them into the court of the latest ideas, charged with the crime of being characterless, mere puppets of

the will of the dominant sex; not the tutors, indeed, but the feeders of his riot, complaisant creatures who accept the purpose of the universe to keep men supplied with love, and whose most prominent traits are those which protect and confirm the union of the sexes. It is alleged that Shakspeare "never foretold a better woman than he saw," because "he lacked an ideal of humanity and life:" he withheld from her the personal consequence which belongs to strong individualities who detach themselves from their age to view, scrutinize, and remodel it. It is astonishing to read what Mrs. Farnham,* whose life was most unselfish and heroic, has said about Shakspeare's ideas of women, that "he authorized in his sentiments all manner of passional, sensual, and drunken usurpation of man over woman, every kind of force to degrade her which the law did not punish; and only felt bound to satirize and speak coarsely of *her* after it had been exercised; men, who repeated such experiences never so often or basely, being no less heroes for his dramas, fit to lead in council, rule in honorable war, and receive the homage of society. The leading characteristics of woman, as he portrayed her, are sensuality, and fickleness, its uniform attendant in either sex; capriciousness, vanity, desire to be loved, more for the power than the pure happiness of it; a disposition to exercise that fleeting, petty power tyrannically, — so far, to play the man on the child's scale; weakness, helplessness indeed, against temptation, and a paramount selfishness which is only modified, or very rarely turned into

* In a volume entitled "Woman and her Era."

generosity, towards the man whose love permits her to love in return ; for which, and chiefly, in its narrowest, most material sense, she seems in his estimation to have been created."

It is not possible to misread the plays of Shakspeare more profoundly than this. They have been viewed in the color of some exclusive ideas concerning the nature and the mission of woman, in whose advocacy the writer spent a noble life. Not finding in any of the plays precise statements that reflect the most advanced sentiments upon the Woman Question, and discovering that Shakspeare was neither morally nor politically a partisan, and that neither position nor reflection impelled him to anticipate modern ideas on social subjects, the writer declares that he was not the poet of woman because he was not her prophet. A criticism more destructive than this of the Shakspearean delineations cannot be made. In fact, no *doctrinaire* of ethics, politics, theology, can suitably approach Shakspeare with a critical purpose.

Nature seems to have draughted many of her women in the mind of Shakspeare before she embodied them to play their parts. Already there existed Antigone, Medea, Electra, and the ensky'd Beatrice ; but these did not exhaust her capacity of womanhood. They seem only sketches of a few single features, portraits of isolated qualities that waited to be combined. Medea was the hate of a mortified and neglected love ; Electra was the unsleeping persistency of a daughter's revenge ; Antigone, the divine constancy of a daughter's affection ; Ismene, the weakness of a common mind ; Alcestis,

the extravagant submission of a tender wife: they are all single strings of the old Greek lyre, never tuned to sweep into a perfect octave. The note which Alcestis emits is merely her willingness to die. Imogen sounds the same at the command of a husband who suspects her honor. But it wakes the harmony of other strings, and we listen to a chastity that is as spirited and deadly as it is submissive; to a love that is as eager as it is refined; to an honesty that exposes the discord of double dealing by chiming with a simplicity that scarce knows how to suspect; to a purity that is as unconscious as a girl, while it is as haughty as a man. The chords are rich and solid, and support the theme of her character through all its movements.

So women began to exist for the first time in literature. Shakspeare discovered woman, and took note of her generic peculiarity which upholds the specific differences of individual women. They all came forth to him as surely as flowers to the sun. He solicited each jealously interfolded sheath, and drew out of it the heart of its color. All of them are rooted in the common ground of sex; but each one lifts into the blossom her signals of a temper and modulation that are peculiarly her own. So that, although "each woman is a brief of Womankind," she is also a woman who must be designated by some one of Shakspeare's famous names.

In fact, genius was never penetrated with the varieties of woman's temperament till Shakspeare, picking up a few rustic specimens in Stratford, ran away with them to London, taking down there honest, red-fisted Audrey;

Phebe, the village coquette, a little above her condition, who reads and quotes tender love-lore, and learns to despise a swain; Mopsa and Dorcas, doting on ballads, watchful after pedlars to chaffer with across the hedge for tapes and ribbons; and Juliet's gossipy, free-spoken, easy-minded Mrs. Gamp. With this humble retinue, his imagination travelled down to the great city, and seemed to have introduced them soon, past all the barriers of etiquette, into Elizabeth's circle of ladies, where they went into the service of high-born qualities, and retailed to him the very heart-secrets of their mistresses. The dames of wealthy citizens sat in full costume for his "Merry Wives;" the noble partners of his friends and patrons yielded each to him a whisper of their chasteness, their high-spirit, their control, their tenderness.

> "In the blazon of sweet beauty's best
> Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,"

he mastered Beauty of the form and soul, and gave to each her portion, from Imogen to Cleopatra, —

> "The worser spirit, a woman color'd ill."

One could not, of course, claim for Shakspeare that his pages include all the varieties of women which Nature is capable of producing. He has no daughters of the people, like Egmont's Clara and Faust's Margaret: they are conceptions of a later date. But they are implied in the quality of his women; and we incline to think that Nature will not be able to invent a fresh style of woman, or to modify the standard types, unless she sets out with that essential peculiarity, the Womanliness,

which Shakspeare has described. As all the instruments of an orchestra are tuned upon a single pitch, and as all future modifications of the instruments must defer to the same if they mean to take rank in harmony, so all the women who are still possible to Nature must accord with her influential note. Shakspeare is content to strike that. Through all the chords which cluster around his different characters, we detect it: he seems to be making tuning-forks on the same pitch, but of various materials, to emphasize it to the ear. His plays take from it a consonant vibration that extends through scenes and lapses of time during which no woman's face appears. The tonic of her heart is diffused beyond the limits of her person; as when Ophelia's bloom clings to the fate of Hamlet, even while she waits in death for him to reach her funeral-rite. So the beautiful soul of Cordelia, that is little talked of by herself, and is but stingily set forth by circumstance, engrosses our feeling in scenes from whose threshold her filial piety is banished. We know what Lear is so pathetically remembering: the sisters tell us in their cruellest moments; it mingles with the midnight storm, a sigh of the daughterhood that was repulsed. In the pining of the Fool we detect it. Through every wail or gust of this awful symphony of madness, ingratitude, and irony, we feel a woman's breath.

Since Shakspeare's day, new countries have been discovered and peopled; new colonies have carried his mother-tongue around the earth; the language of woman, like the girdle of a goddess, is a zone drawn round all

other climates to hold them in the clasp of her charm. The wider culture and the opportunities derived from modern wants have already increased the number of her gifts, and set her person in fresh shadings of character. Perhaps Macaulay's New Zealander, who is expected to meditate in the future over the ruins of London, will turn out to be a woman, of a variety which Shakspeare has nowhere precisely drawn. But, if all his plays should by that time have shared the fate of an extinguished England, there would she sit, the survivor in the direct line of descent from his essential Woman; by virtue of her sex the Sibyl foretelling the women who will be possible to Nature.

> "Magnus ab integro sæclorum nascitur ordo:
> Jam redit et Virgo."

Woman, as she resembles man, was of less consequence to Shakspeare than woman in herself, apart from what she can do, can earn, or can aspire to. He merely received the feminine side of Nature into his recreating thought, the essential Woman, without respect to the exigencies of any period or style of culture, — the only She, such as woman must remain to the end of time underneath all her activities and requirements. Her sex is the unalterable decree which she can cast no ballot to vote away from her, and assume no profession to raze it from the eternal tablets of her distinction. All the purely modern questions which relate to her career; the efforts to equalize with man's her wages, to multiply her opportunities, to claim her interest in the politics of human rights, to secure her alleviating presence in the rude

scenes of republicanism, — successful as these tendencies may be, — cannot transform Woman ; and she will not step out of her Shakspearean Self. On the figured coast of his page her Essence stands, as yet without the right of suffrage, limited to household cares, or raised to queenly ones ; as learned as Portia can become, but not yet admitted to the profession which she mimicked ; provided for by the various dexterities of man, and still undriven by the modern threat of starvation into risking a single quality that is her birthright. There she stands : the modern world, stooping at her feet, will have to yield some of the reputed exclusiveness of men, but only such traits of it as Imogen, Cordelia, Beatrice, Portia, will select. In all this complicated period of over-crowded cities, over-stimulated competition, vices overfed, employers over-purse-proud, and politicians over-careless, there is no strait cruel enough to compel the essential woman to choose a career which would have unsexed one of Shakspeare's plays. I have no fear. Stand aside : cease that frantic bracing of the masculine back against so many doors of prescription. Throw them wide open, and let Shakspeare's stately crowd pass up and down to scan the vista through them. Come, patient, chaste, obedient, high-spirited Imogen, too docile Ophelia, frank Perdita, warm Julia, bright and witty Beatrice, whose tongue is a pen already, or the etcher's tool ; come, thou accomplished, grave, acute, and self-possessed Portia ; thou unsophisticated Miranda, who would fain share thy lover's toil ; thou shifty, prompt Maria, hater of humbug ; thou tender Viola, — come, choose how many of

these men's garments you will continue to wear, preferring to be women. Not one of them, I venture to declare, which your eternal instinct will feel to cramp or to disguise the form. "Dost thou think," says Rosalind, "though I am caparison'd like a man, I have a doublet and hose in my disposition?"

Perdita, I think, if she were not discovered to be a king's daughter, might take to floriculture, and earn a living by it. She would no longer keep her dainty pique against the gilly-flower, but learn to marry

"A gentler scion to the wildest stock,"

and thus mend Nature. She would prefer to be "Flora peering in April's front," along meadows which Proserpine might have roved through, far from the university and the din of scholarships. And pray restrain Ophelia from the commission of suicide by joining a nunnery; but do not save her life to put her to a trade that turns upon any other knack than simple beauty. A woman who can enthrall a Hamlet will esteem it no derogation to pluck from his memory a rooted sorrow. It is a profession quite as sanative as Helena's, whose father had taught her the use of curious drugs, and bequeathed to her "prescriptions of rare and prov'd effects." But let Ophelia be simply beautiful, be surprising like the first May-flowers, be winning like unobtrusive violets; let her exhale, like slopes that are brown with needles of the pine. Preserve the maid who held Hamlet's princely heart in the hollow of a moist and rosy hand: let her survive among us to hold others, to unwrinkle brows of

speculation with a finger-tip, to unknot the snarls of business and ferocious care with kisses which the street will not overhear. Out of all her craze may she gather up again and redistribute the flowers of her shy disposition, "for remembrance; pray you, love, remember;" and some for herself too, "we may call it herb of grace o' Sundays."

Do not tempt Ophelia to drown herself again

> "With annoyance of charity schools or of districts."

Turn over all such business to that pragmatic and correct Isabella: she will do better in it than in making a whole nunnery miserable with posted notices of the dangers to virtue and of rules for being severely let alone. But Ophelia,

> "Live, be lovely, forget them, be beautiful even to proudness,
> Even for their poor sakes whose happiness is to behold you;
> Live, be uncaring, be joyous, be sumptuous; only be lovely, —
> Sumptuous, not for display, and joyous, not for enjoyment;
> Not for enjoyment, truly; for Beauty and God's great glory.
> Built by that only law, that Use be suggester of Beauty,
> Nought be concealed that is done, but all things done to adornment,
> Meanest utilities seized as occasions to grace and embellish."

LOVE IN SHAKSPEARE.

The great motives and impulses of human nature do not find themselves made obsolete by Shakspeare's genius: we meet the central passion of Love animating every play, and modified by the various characteristics

of his women. They appear in the plots, as in the world, to discharge that great function of their being. Steele once said of a woman, "To have loved her was a liberal education," — a happy phrase which has done duty since in other connections. There must have been floating in Steele's mind the verses of Biron in "Love's Labors Lost;" at least, the pith of his sentence is there anticipated: —

> "For when would you, my lord, or you, or you,
> Have found the ground of study's excellence,
> Without the beauty of a woman's face?
> From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
> They are the ground, the books, the Academes,
> From whence doth spring the true Promethean fire.
> For where is any author in the world
> Teaches such beauty as a woman's eye?"

"Without love I can fancy no gentleman," says Thackeray.

When Shakspeare shows his characters in love, the passion is as fresh and uncompromising as if it were still the morning of the world. His verse "dallies with the innocence of love, like the old age." The curious considerations of the modern novelist were not then invented. His lovers trump up no obstacles out of over-nice and subtle reflection: all that hampers them is circumstance, a family feud, a transparent jealousy, a disguise of fortune, a father's will, or a conspiracy. They do not take themselves apart before us, as lecturers do their manikin, to show how cunningly morbid the organs may become. There is no mesh of motives woven around and across, so intricately that if the lover

breaks from one of his own threads he can catch himself by another, and keep worrying the poor fly of his feeling. Shakspeare's women love without sparing a moment for analysis: the rose is crushed to the bosom, a glory of stamens, petals, and perfume, whose names are unknown and unheeded; for the botanizing of emotions was the æsthetic of a later day when men cull a herbarium from their mothers' graves. In this regard Shakspeare is as direct as the Greeks, though far more vital. He puts into his live people the passion which the old chorus used to hold up like a placard:—

> Love, thou invincible battle! *
> Love, thou router of lucre,
> To capture the softness of youth
> And lodge in the bloom of its cheeks!
> 'Tis all one to thee if thou farest
> By sea, or dost loiter in farm-yards.
> It helps not to be an immortal;
> Mankind is no refuge from thee
> Who art of men the first madness.
> Thou dost ravish the just of their judgment,
> Dost snatch them to blame;
> Thou art the bicker that vexes
> The blood in the hearts that are kin.
> Vivid the promise of bride-bed
> Thou kindlest on eyelids of virgins,
> Great prescripts of past time undoing:
> So sports Aphrodite, and rules.

Shakspeare has inherited the antique single-mindedness, undisturbed by all our modern after-thoughts of sentiment. His heroines do not understand what refinements of torture a cultivated soul can invent to make itself wretched. They are frank and instantane-

* Antigone, 792, Ἔρως, ἀνίκατε μάχαν.

ous; as when Miranda puts her heart into Ferdinand's hand, so sweetly unconscious of all that the action involves. She only knows that she has "no ambition to see a goodlier man," no arts to use to win him, no starting to overtake the passion with a pack of doubts.

> "Hence, bashful cunning,
> And prompt me, plain and holy innocence!
> I am your wife, if you will marry me."

The only game she plays with him is chess, but she does better than stale-mate him.

Beatrice, for all her cleverness, shows that she loves Benedick in the first words she utters in the play. For she asks if he has returned from the wars, and gives him a fencing-term for a nickname, to pretend a profound unconcern; then disparages him in a most lively way, and asks whom he has now for a companion, seeming to allude to men, but expecting to know by the answer if his affections have become involved with any woman. And when he fences her wit with his bachelor banter, it piques her secret admiration. She has no other subtlety beyond her wit: she uses it to misprize the wedded state, and to mock indiscriminately at men, — a very common and transparent stratagem of a heart that is deeply engaged; and, beneath all the gay and flippant manner, she feels hurt because she thinks that Benedick is really cool and does not feign.

There is nothing but the mask of night upon Juliet's face to hide the blush which her lips acknowledge. "Farewell compliment. Dost thou love me?" The bud of love becomes a beauteous flower in its first

spring day, for it is too impatient to levy on the lagging warmth of summer; and the sudden heat sends every drop of Juliet's blood rushing into the frankest words that maiden ever spoke. She has not even mental device enough to hush what the most passionate women, of a type less frigid than our own, are quite content to feel if there's love enough to justify. So the verses which come fluent from Juliet's lips do not scald like the insinuations of some modern novels which plot random passions and ingeniously dally with them. Shakspeare has no pages of this elaborate suggestion. His mental style was like the archer's bolt that quivers in the middle of the boss: he never could have learned this modern practice of the boomerang, which dips, skims, makes ricochets, lingers, doubles corners, and plays back into the sender's hand.

> "A murderous guilt shows not itself more soon
> Than love that would seem hid: love's night is noon."

The finest of his ladies cry out with the sudden smart.

> "Cæsario, by the roses of the spring,
> By maidhood, honor, truth, and every thing,
> I love thee so, that, maugre all my pride,
> Nor wit, nor reason, can my passion hide."

Perhaps this is not a style that might be safely cultivated in our female boarding-schools, unless all the Cæsarios were Violas in disguise. But it is Love's ideal sincerity as it lives in Poesy's world to quicken sluggards and scorch prurience to death.

His love is not only unsophisticated: it is as virile, sumptuous, adventurous, intense, as the age which

crushed the Armada as if it were a cluster to infuse new blood into England. It shares the intrepidity of all the sea-kings, but declines their ruffling and bluster. It is colored like the costumes of the nobles, who vaunted their rich stuffs and set the dull streets aglow like a parterre of flowers, before we began to exchange doublets and slashed satin for the hypocritic pantaloon. Its manner is free, reliant, full of respect and of a proudness of honor: sometimes it lets the flashing blade be seen at a touch of the ruffled wrist; sometimes it subdues all the grand state into deference, cap in hand, till the plumes sweep the ground clean before the beloved object. It has been reared in Anglo-Saxon bluntness. It is as broad and light-pervaded as a forenoon; but sometimes it is like those forenoons which appear to have saved over afternoon shades from yesterdays, they are so toned with the pearliness of a refraining light. It has risen early, and its elastic steps brush dew, and its freshly opened eyes are dawns. We seem to have returned with these lovers to a long-past epoch of the world, when Love had been just invented and put on trial among men and women of heroic mould and simple manners, who let the new passion flood them to the brim of their brains and turn every sense into its heralds. They report something so antique as to be young; and our jaded nerves respond to the tonic of a feeling that is for the first time tried. So deeply does Shakspeare's genius dip the heart into the old stream that makes invulnerable and immortal.

He sets forth the passion as it defies races, passes

frontiers unsearched, and makes all the sects religious. The Catholic maiden, who has overheard that St. Bartholomew would have a bloody eve, puts the white sign of safety round the arm of her Huguenot lover; but the fingers of his sword-arm pull it off, though all the binding love in her face pleads for the dear deceit, and justifies it to all of his heart that is not dedicated to die with comrades. Her religion, — what is it but the sacrament that converts her adored one into the body and the blood of her life? Henceforth High Mass must celebrate for her a double sacrifice.

Shakspeare contrived to rear a race of women whose physical soundness was unimpaired. Before the gymnasium and the health-lift were invented at the peevish persuasion of dyspeptics and invalids, who die by inches of fried food, furnace-air, fricassees of high-school programmes, and ragouts of French novels, his women earned their health on horseback in the broad English fields: they called it down to them out of the sky, where the hawk struck the heron and returned to perch upon the wrist; they came upon its track in the sylvan paths which the startled deer extemporized; they overtook it in long stretches of breezy walks upon the heathery downs and in the hawthorn-bounded lane. The country's Nature was their training-room, and its unsophisticated habits their masters. They saw the sun rise, and could not afford time to outflare the setting crescent with gaslight streaming from overheated rooms; nor did the stately minuet ravage like the German which is sustained into the small hours upon rations of beef-

tea and various liquors. They drank small-beer for breakfast, and knew the taste of herrings before the Turks invaded the nerves of Christendom with coffee, and the Chinese began to tan its stomach with the acid of teas. At twelve o'clock, a cup of malmsey, with a wedge of venison-pasty, scared up no megrims in constitutions which had followed the deer through the forest into the larder, and had pulled it down there with dexterous hands into the dish. Imogen was a prime cook, dressed vegetables in various devices to make them dainty to the eye, and flavored broth fit for Juno. She never caught cold on the floor of the cave. The forest was as courteous to her as the court.

Not one of Shakspeare's women utters one line that is inspired by any form of hysteria: the perfect balance of the functions was not yet impaired; so that no nerve-centre could exercise a petty tyranny, nor suggest the morbid fancies and curious superfluities which dedicate so many late romances to St. Vitus, the patron of spasm.

In an admirable book upon "Sex in Education, or a Fair Chance for the Girls," I found embedded in an excellent vein of common sense the following obscure statement, quoted from another author: "Peripheral influences of an extremely powerful and continuous kind, where they concur with one of those critical periods of life at which the central nervous system is relatively weak and unstable, can occasionally set going a non-inflammatory centric atrophy, which may localize itself in those nerves upon whose centres the morbific peripheral influence is perpetually pouring in." Here

be words almost as depressing as the ills which the flesh of the modern woman is heiress to ; but that legacy cannot be traced as far back as the poetry of that age when the Queen rode along the line of her English soldiers at Tilbury Fort, while Dorcas and Mopsa helped to stack barley to malt the ale for her maids of honor. I doubt if Shakspeare was familiar with many cases, transpiring in the town or the country, of women demolished by "morbific peripheral influence."

So the bodies of his women mature like all the nature out of doors, and become capable of entertaining the great passion with its own strenuous, unconscious innocence, with its honest ardor, with its native directness. Obscure ailments do not warp his verses, nor twang sick pathos out of their nerves. And we seek the society of these unsensational women, just as we seek Shakspeare's verse itself ; with the same hope to earn repose for the soul which has been so taxed by the strained rhetoric of later writers. For relief, we recur to the pregnant moderation of Shakspeare's style. Pyrotechnics tire the eye, and send the dazed spectator groping home, as they seem to make more darkness by exploding. One reason for the revival of interest and love for Shakspeare may be found in a natural reaction from artifice and overwrought expression. The heated mind has discovered an oasis and deep well that wait in this sirocco-stricken age with coolness for our hearts. How eagerly we run toward this shadowed margin where his great power is greatly tempered to our human feeling! His vivacity has been so bred by repose that it never strays beyond the line

where stimulus becomes inebriation. He not only despises the abrupt effects which are darlings of the modern pen, but he resolutely refuses to represent abruptness; and his fancy makes its rapid time by even and placid motion; as a great sea-bird, with outstretched wings, in which you scarcely can detect a winnow, will follow the speed of your ship and be seen constantly poised just above the stern. All his figures have the same breadth and floating quality: they take you, as on an expanse of Fortunatus's carpet, upon a great journey silently. They are not apothecary's expedients to raise a blister by sharp surprise, to lash up a jaded taste by some cantharides of metaphor and simile, to rouse a torpid skin by acupuncture, or dull a heavy pain by injected morphia, as our modern practitioners of the ideal do, who have abused tired Nature's sweet restorer and the digestion that should wait on appetite.

And every gesture of Shakspeare, even when he has violence to describe, is not violently made; but the most tremendous deeds are emphasized by having their bluster chidden and their outcry hushed; so the great midnight lifts a finger of silence, but shudders none the less, and sinks to awful depths with the crime which has fastened itself upon her secrecy, as if to drag her dumbly out of the sweet heaven down to a place of horror. While Macbeth goes to Duncan's chamber, and the wife listens to hear death follow, the verse turns over the business of shrieking to the owl: an elemental dread from the unsounded depth of human feeling puts an accent on the scene.

Since Shakspeare's time, our rhetoric has been slowly raising its pitch, just as the musical instruments had been doing it until a congress was called to reduce to a normal note of *C*, with two hundred and twelve vibrations in a second, the pitch that had become so exaggerated. Handel was content to write a minor third below even that. What a pity that a congress of the best minds could not impose a normal pitch upon the shrieking muse, the new Calliope, who goes by steam!

Observe the level, unobtrusive nature of Shakspeare's Sonnets and of the songs in the plays. The difference between them and our later scaling of the falsetto is like the difference between the moderately strung violins of Salo and Amati and the violin of the present day. Those antique violins were made to accompany soprano voices which had no ambition to reach high *C*, as all men's ears were then content with the medium register. "Their gently veiled, yet satisfactorily clear, silver tone, of virgin character," describes the songs of Shakspeare, and the sentiment for music which is scattered through the plays. In the middle notes almost every thing that is worth having in music is to be found. Behind those bars the melodies which can be domesticated under man's roof and by his hearthside are patiently waiting to be led forth and be installed. Shakspeare used to listen lovingly to the cheerful, healthy madrigal of Elizabeth's age, so wholesome in effect, so downright sincere in expression, so full of the robust, sensuous life of those brave English days, when human habits and emotions dwelt in the middle register of life, and there

found Nature's own fulness and harmony, the finely blended color of passion and thought. But nowadays the daffodils that used to

> "Take
> The winds of March with beauty; violets, dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
> Or Cytherea's breath; . . .
> . . . bold oxlips, and
> The crown-imperial,"

have been plied with guano, dosed with new-fangled liquid manures, till their cosmetic and perfume announce a kind of harlotry: we ogle, sigh, languishingly sniff, and die of a rose in a rheumatic pain.

The gamut of feeling among Shakspeare's women is the clear and perfect octave which built the English glee and madrigal, whose untutored music was "the food of love." And love was entirely welcome, like the daylight; not put off and played with as if by the effeminacies of some Asiatic musical scale, whose eighth and quarter tones cannot be distinguished by a well modulated ear.

> "What is Love? 'tis not hereafter;
> Present mirth hath present laughter;
> What's to come is still unsure;
> In delay there lies no plenty:
> Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
> Youth's a stuff will not endure."

Does this have a crude ring of the bivouac to any ear which has been accustomed to the macaronic variations of modern artists, who torture the great theme and force its simple blitheness through the brass crooks of a keyed cornet? 'Tis an honest love whose month is ever May,

when the pipe of Pan is breathed upon by the clear west wind through the budding willows. Nothing competes with it but the throstle and song-sparrow: they seem to be weaving sacred nests out of the tones, to gather them into domestic privacy. Climb, count with delight the jealously guarded eggs, and do not blow them for your cabinet.

Nature was so prodigal of health to Shakspeare's women that it overflowed the clay banks of their bodies, and spread in a freshet of gayety. Beatrice and Rosalind never tire of keeping in the air the light shuttlecock of their wit. It floats in an æther of animal spirits; and, if it now and then touches earth, Nature promptly lends it a rebound. They engage in a masked revel to conceal their emotions. Will Orlando and Benedick penetrate the disguise and claim the lips that mockingly escape thus? If these women suspect their hearts to be distilling a sigh, laughter sparkles into the recess and exposes the illicit business. It is just like the men to roam about in disordered attire, with blue, inclement features, shaking with the "quotidian-tertian" of their love-turn. If they do not go about thus, it is all the same: then they are rallied for not being in Cupid's fashion. "Your hose should be ungarter'd, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbuttoned, your shoe untied, and every thing about you demonstrating a careless desolation." The gladness of these women would be cautioned at the lorn sight to defend themselves from infection.

Orlando sticks his rhymes up in the forest, like a bill-poster of Radway's Ready Relief, deforming the sturdier

oaks. Rosalind goes about pulling them down, and is in the best of spirits when Touchstone declares that he could "rhyme you so, eight years together; dinners, and suppers, and sleeping-hours excepted:" his verses have the regular butter-woman's jog-trot. She was never so nearly berhymed to death since she was an Irish rat in the time of Pythagoras. But, for all that, she is full of bliss to discover that this fancy-monger of rhymes is Orlando; and she is dying to know "what did he? What said he? How look'd he? Wherein went he? What makes he here? Did he ask for me? Where remains he? How parted he with thee? And when shalt thou see him again? Answer me in one word." To be sure, she wears a double disguise of wit and male attire; so when Orlando says to her, "Fair youth, I would I could make thee believe I love," it is easy for her to reply, "Me believe it? You may as soon make her that you love believe it; which, I warrant, she is apter to do than to confess she does; that is one of the points in the which women still give the lie to their consciences." But when, pretending to ridicule his emotion, she tells him that "men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love," he protests that Rosalind's frown might kill him. "By this hand," she says, "it will not kill a fly." So all the exuberant frolic of these fine women is the sparkle of healthy brains: the heart's-blood of love does not trickle through hepatic sentiment, but is briskly pumped through the lungs up into the head, flashes from the eye, and becomes a ruddy zest upon the tongue.

Benedick complains that the Lady Beatrice said he was the prince's jester, that he was 'duller than a great thaw; huddling jest upon jest, with such impossible conveyance, upon me, that I stood like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me. While she is here, a man may live as quiet in hell as in a sanctuary; and people sin upon purpose, because they would go thither."

When, however, she overhears Hero giving her wit a bad character for scorn and inhumanity, her woman's heart revolts at the suggestion, and her self-communion runs thus tenderly:—

> "What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
> Stand I condemn'd for pride and scorn so much?
> Contempt, farewell! and maiden pride, adieu!
> No glory lives behind the back of such.
> And, Benedick, love on, I will requite thee;
> Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand."

So the keen, swooping falcon settles at last composedly upon his wrist: love draws a hood over the bright, fearless eye, and claps the jesses upon her spirits. But at the very moment of capture, her strong wings fillip him: "I yield upon great persuasion; and, partly, to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption." That tone has in it the promise of lively times for Benedick. He will never be able to train the delight of liberty out of this falcon, who will slip her jesses still, and circle overhead, but not forget to return. He told her once that, as long as she had no mind to love, "some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate scratched face." But, though love has pared her talons, Benedick will not find matrimony to be dull.

Portia's whole temperament is joyous, even when she pretends that her little body is aweary of the world. Not one of Shakspeare's women shows such a perfect balance of the senses and the soul. Not a muscle of the body ever owned to being tired; not a function ever behaved ill enough to clog her gayety. It flows with mild and even sparkle through all the varied scenes, like a sunlit runnel that carries gilded dimples into woods and through them without lingering to have them catch a damp from shadows. Even the judicial fitness of her great language in the scene with Shylock does not sprinkle chancellor's wig-powder over her cheek. The style has the bloom of health, as it always is with her, "rosy, clear-ringing. How warm with joy are her words! How beautiful all her images, which are for the most part borrowed from mythology!" And we notice that her fancy always selects the classic allusions which are most vital with thought, freshness, sentiment. "If I live to be as old as Sibylla, I will die as chaste as Diana, unless I be obtained by the manner of my father's will." And when she watches Bassanio, as he is on the point of choosing among the caskets, what is he like? she thinks; and the mighty youth of Greece supplies her thought: —

> "Now he goes,
> With no less presence, but with much more love,
> Than young Alcides, when he did redeem
> The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy
> To the sea-monster; I stand for sacrifice,
> The rest aloof are the Dardanian wives,
> With bleared visages, come forth to view
> The issue of th' exploit. Go, Hercules!
> Live thou, I live."

PORTIA.

PORTIA.

IN the elements which compose the character of Portia, Shakspeare anticipated, but without intention, the intellect of those modern women who can wield so gracefully many of the tools which have been hitherto monopolized by men. But the same genius which endowed her with a large and keen intelligence derived it from her sex, and, for the sake of it, he did not sacrifice one trait of her essential womanliness. This commands our attention very strongly; for it is the clew which we must start with.

She is still a woman to the core of her beauty-loving heart. Coming home from the great scene in Venice, where she baffles Shylock, and swamps with sudden justice the scales that were so eager for the bonded flesh, she loiters in the moonlight, marks the music which is floating from her palace to be caressed by the night and made sweeter than by day. Her listening ear is modulated by all the tenderness she feels and the love she expects; so she gives the music the color of a soul that has come home to wife and motherhood, till her thoughts put such a strain upon the vibrating strings that they grow too tense, and threaten to divulge her delicate secret. So she cries, —

> "Peace! Now the moon sleeps with Endymion,
> And would not be awak'd."

Her graceful passion takes shelter in the old myth whose names personify her thought. And her style of speaking reminds us of the more polished ladies of Shakspeare's time, who delighted in the masques and revels in which the persons of the old mythology were charged to utter gallant sentiments. She is a woman of Juliet's clime, and not without her frankness; but she has been brought up in England, and her feeling and her judgment are English through and through.

She has been forbidden by her father's testament to make free choice of the man whom she will love. But she could as soon be divested of her intellect as of her power and wish to love. There is not a single drop running through all her fairness that has caught a chill from the quarter of her brain where wit and wisdom ponder in their clear north light. Her mind is strong, but not the mind of a man, and with no traits more masculine than her frame itself, which is love's solicitor: —

> "Here are sever'd lips,
> Parted with sugar breath."

And even in her strict speech to Shylock we can feel the light draught of it, tempering the inclemency of her superb and unexpected threat: the Jew quails under the sentences which rain on him, golden, grave, serene. And they compel us to observe that pure sex has given the pitch to her strong, fatal wisdom. We cannot detect any thin and stridulous quality, like that of the well-gristled Duchess of Gloster, who repaid a box of the ear with these two lines: —

> "Could I come near your beauty with my nails,
> I'd set my ten commandments in your face."

If among the points of a well-nurtured woman there be those that are feline, they are generally retracted into velvet sheaths, and scarce surmised to be there till a scratch is made so silently that you have no evidence of it but your blood. But if Old Probabilities should overhear a woman blustering in a fashion as follows, —

> "Though in this place most master wear no breeches,
> She shall not strike Dame Eleanor unreveng'd," —

he would at once order cautionary signals. When a man scolds in the pulpit or a woman on the platform, the planets shudder, shrink, and grow more crusty.

Bassanio had caught a throb from the soft breath of Portia which seemed to be a herald of the beauty he describes afterwards when the lucky lid is lifted, —

> "Here in her hairs
> The painter plays the spider, and hath woven
> A golden mesh t' entrap the hearts of men,
> Faster than gnats in cobwebs ; but her eyes !
> How could he see to do them ? Having made one,
> Methinks, it should have power to steal both his,
> And leave itself unfurnish'd."

She knows that this portrait of herself lies in the leaden casket ; so that whenever a suitor comes to speculate upon the chance of finding it, how that sweet breath must break into flurries of dread which call into the eyes a distant alarm ! For, before her father died, she had seen Bassanio, and secretly preferred him ; and we hear him tell Antonio in confidence that

> "Sometimes from her eyes
> I did receive fair speechless messages."

No doubt he did ; but they escaped to him just like prisoners' glances that are in vague quest of some confederate instinct, and slip through a grating ; for she was double-locked in durance of shyness and enforced seclusion, and, "in terms of choice," could not be

> "Solely led
> By nice direction of a maiden's eyes : "

kept aloof and sacred by an oath to a dying father, yet so perfectly a woman that too little rather than too much betrayed her ; for, as she says, "a maiden hath no tongue but thought."

The princely suitors file before the caskets, pondering how to match her picture with herself. She has all the captivating glamour of a pure blonde.

> "Her sunny locks
> Hang on her temples like a golden fleece ;
> Which makes her seat of Belmont, Colchos' strand,
> And many Jasons come in quest of her."

While these Jasons agitate her heart by deliberating over the metals of the caskets, the real suitor lies hidden underneath the lead of her manner, and seems to stretch forth a forbidding hand. To the Prince of Arragon, while the cornets relieve her by executing all the flourish, she coldly says, —

> "Behold, there stand the caskets, noble prince :
> If you choose that wherein I am contain'd,
> Straight shall our nuptial rites be solemniz'd ;
> But if you fail, without more speech, my lord,
> You must be gone from hence immediately."

This is much more curt than the style of her address to the Emperor of Morocco, who, although wearing "the

shadow'd livery of the burnish'd sun," had something too of its warmth and openness in the manner of his wooing.

> "I would not change this hue,
> Except to steal your thoughts, my gentle queen."

That went straight to her woman's heart. "I am black, but fair," it said; and, like Desdemona, she could see "Othello's visage in his mind." But Desdemona's heart was fancy-free. Portia not only had a mind that could not be fancy-led, but her heart was lying in Bassanio's hand, where its life woke, like the gem whose color kindles better at the touch of warmth. Still, the recognition of the Emperor's frank passion came forth, toned at once by respect and courtesy: —

> "If my father had not scanted me,
> And hedg'd me by his wit, to yield myself
> His wife, who wins me by that means I told you,
> Yourself, renowned prince, then stood as fair
> As any comer I have look'd on yet."

She may safely say as much as that. And, when he fails, she smooths her exit from his mind by the kind phrase, "A gentle riddance." Then she marks the difference between the women whose hearts can reflect and the Desdemonas of mere sentiment. The former have a firm partition that prevents the mingling of venous and arterial blood: this in the latter has never been quite closed, or is too thin, and liable to be ruptured by emotion. So Desdemona,

> "A maiden never bold,
> Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
> Blush'd at herself,"

broke, as she said, into "downright violence and scorn of fortunes." She "did love the Moor to live with him." Portia, on the contrary, says, "Let all of his complexion choose me so," — it is a hint of the natural aversion of all natures who are representatives of one distinct type from mixing their love with those of another. But I cannot agree with a criticism of John Quincy Adams to the effect that Shakspeare wrote the tragedy of "Othello" on purpose to show the disastrous consequences of miscegenation. Desdemona's weak point is the only fatality in the play. She began by deceiving her father, and secretly made a match which broke his heart. But if she had not recurred to deceit again, and lied to her husband about the handkerchief, his smouldering jealousy would have never blazed. Want of frankness was her contribution to Iago's plot, the element that made it a success. Portia stood to her oath, and ran all risks.

Portia has the strong sense to expect that the majority of her noble admirers will be taken by appearance. She is not quite sure, but has an instinct, that these gentlemen who are after her are also after her pretty property of Belmont, and will be likely to choose the metals responsive to this temper. Bassanio frankly acknowledges to a friend that he would like to repair his broken fortunes; but Shakspeare shows him to be a lover before he gives this mercenary hint; and he has reason to surmise that Portia loves him. This unspoken mutuality dignifies his quest; as if Shakspeare himself would not admit the charge that he is a fortune-hunter. And it is noticeable how little consequence we attach to Bassanio's character.

We do not care to see him in any action, or to have him show a worthiness to be Portia's lover. He is but the lay-figure of her love: there is so much of her that there must be a great deal of him, and he may be spared the trouble of appearing at full length. And we never suspect her of belonging to that tribe of bright women who, either from instinct or calculation, marry good-natured, well-mannered numskulls, and never have reason to sue for a divorce. Shakspeare ennobles Bassanio when the divining soul sees through the leaden lid.

But what if one of the other suitors should also have a noble heart whose pulses feed discernment, one as fine and unconventional as herself! There is just hazard enough to affront her cherishing of the absent Bassanio. She does not relish the moment when her heart, richer than the princes know of, goes into the lottery. However, when her father made his will, it doubtless occurred to her that his choice of metals came from a life's experience of the calibre of the average man, and was meant affectionately to protect her till the true gentleman should come. As Nerissa says, "Your father was ever virtuous; and holy men, at their death, have good inspirations; therefore, the lottery that he hath devised in these three chests, of gold, silver, and lead (whereof *who chooses his meaning* chooses you) will, no doubt, never be chosen by any rightly but one whom you shall rightly love." Fortunate is the man who wins a wife because he chooses Heaven's meaning in a woman! Luckless the wife who is not chosen by some implied Heaven in a man!

The written scrolls which are enclosed in the caskets show that her father anticipated acutely the ordinary motives of mankind. The suitors imagine that they are reflecting in a superior style as they give their reasons for taking to the gold or the silver ; but they are really biased by the common sentiment, as Portia sees : —

> "Oh, these deliberate fools ! When they do choose,
> They have the wisdom by their wit to lose."

So one by one they slaughter themselves and clear the way.

How Shakspeare's verse celebrates Bassanio's approach to Belmont ? It is like a gracious prelude conceived by her secret preference, escaping to guide him to her where she lies under a spell which he must break.

There enters a messenger, sumptuous in blank verse, like the tabard of a herald whose message is desired.

> "Madam, there is alighted at your gate
> A young Venetian, one that comes before
> To signify the approaching of his lord.
> . . . I have not seen
> So likely an ambassador of love :
> A day in April never came so sweet,
> To show how costly summer was at hand,
> As this fore-spurrer comes before his lord."

The lover has reached the enchanted palace, and is in haste to liberate its inmate. Portia might have said, with the antique grace that always clothes her speech, that he came to attack, like a new Perseus, those menacing metals which rivet her in reach of danger, to lift her passionately out of fetters. How she struggles not to show her love, and thus she shows it ! —

"There's something tells me (but it is not love)
I would not lose you; and you know yourself,
Hate counsels not in such a quality."

An ordinary woman might have enmeshed him in a cocoon of delicate coquetries: any woman dead in love, and a little less than strict to an oath, would have managed in some way to provoke that lead casket into twinkling a hint to him. But she is too honest for either. A woman with a soul as tender as it is firm, here she stands dismayed as Destiny is about to rattle its dice upon her heart: happiness, and a future worthy of her, all at stake. For though her mental resources might compete with any fate, she is all woman, made to be a wife, and without wifehood to feel herself at one essential point impaired, — all the more defrauded because so well endowed. How she clings for support to the few moments that yet stand before his choice! She wishes there were more of them to stay her.

"I pray you tarry; . . .
. . . for, in choosing wrong,
I lose your company; therefore, forebear awhile."

She has no courage now: love, when it stole her heart, found that trait too, and added it to the booty.

"Lest you should not understand me well
(And yet a maiden hath no tongue but thought),
I would detain you here some month or two,
Before you venture for me."

The noble lady's plea fills us with admiring pity: we admire to see the strong, beautiful woman so downcast with this new emotion which Heaven has quartered

upon her life; but we pity, because perhaps it will be doomed to dwell alone. And then the more spacious the lodging, the more dreary the echoes of these few sweet hours.

Has she said too much? She has a chase after this frankness to make a struggle to detain it, but it overcomes and gets away: —

> "Beshrew your eyes,
> They have o'erlooked me, and divided me:
> One half of me is yours, the other half yours, —
> Mine own, I would say; but, if mine, then yours,
> And so all yours!"

This freshet of disclosure does not carry away maidenly reserve, for that is transferred from her person and locked up in the coyness of the caskets: in them there lurks a threat, a possible disaster, which lends some pathos to her frankness, and prevents it from forfeiting our respect.

Now Bassanio, who lives upon the rack, denies her plea for delay: "Let me to my fortune and the caskets." How profoundly she surmises that music might lull the watching Fate, so that he could pass to his Eurydice! She bids the music play: —

> "As are those dulcet sounds in break of day,
> That creep into the dreaming bridegroom's ear,
> And summon him to marriage."

Bassanio must be attempered to his choice; the song's key must have an instinct for the proper casket's key. Unconsciously she breaks her oath; for what benign influence selected the song that is now sung? Some

star, whose tenant was her father? Or was it Nerissa's doing, who determined to convey a hint to the lover? Or did Gratiano hit upon it, who had got from Nerissa a promise of her love if the choice went to suit her? A hint, indeed! It is the very breadth of broadness, and a lover is not dull.

"Tell me, where is fancy bred, —
Or in the heart, or in the head?
How begot, how nourishèd?
Reply, reply.
It is engender'd in the eyes,
With gazing fed; and fancy dies
In the cradle where it lies.
Let us all ring fancy's knell:
I'll begin it, — Ding, dong, bell,
Ding, dong, bell."

A song that did good sexton-service, for fancy's knell is rung indeed. The strain reminds Bassanio of notices in his experience: that error hides its grossness in ornament; vice assumes some mark of virtue; beauty is for sale by the weight, and is a show which cunning puts on to entrap wise men: in short, as the song says, fancies* come by gazing, have no life deeper than the eyes, and die where they are born. The strain wakes up his mind into its nobler attitude. "So may the outward shows be least themselves." This fortune-hunter, after all, is Portia's counterpart. The melody woven out of air glides into his hand and becomes a clew to bliss. Oh, the woman thrills! in touching the lead his hand has clutched her heart, and forces from her words

* Sometimes in Shakspeare the word *fancy* means a genuine passion: here it hints only at a passing sentiment.

that are outbreaks of that which is everlastingly the Woman. They assail, they challenge man to say what is so great as love. This polished, clear, sagacious, gifted, balanced woman dares man to say love is not greatest of all.

> "How all the other passions fleet to air,
> As doubtful thoughts, and rash-embrac'd despair,
> And shudd'ring fear, and green-ey'd jealousy!
> O love,
> Be moderate, allay thy ecstasy;
> In measure rein thy joy, scant this excess.
> I feel too much thy blessing; make it less,
> For fear I surfeit."

Thus the lips which an oath had sealed melt apart in the first kiss, and her heart, like a fluid ruby, rushes through.

Shakspeare's women never trickle into tepid acceptances: their *Yes* to love is not puckered in a mouth shaped by "prisms and propriety;" it is not a whisper through a closet key-hole, which the lover, overhearing, doubts may possibly be *No*. The Duke, in "Twelfth Night," steals rhetoric to utter Shakspeare's feeling about great-hearted and full-blooded women: —

> "How will she love, when the rich, golden shaft
> Hath kill'd the flock of all affections else
> That live in her! when liver, brain, and heart,
> These sovereign thrones, are all supplied, and fill'd
> (Her sweet perfections) with one self king!"

Yet Portia, whom Nature made capable of this rapture, had wit enough to invent comedies of life and character, judgment enough to devise the best ways, acumen that astonished Venetian subtlety, as it baffled

Shylock so neatly that the surprise of wit is imparted to us. No modern parson could speak with such sweet gravity of persuasion upon the quality of mercy; no bright schemer of novels could spice her conversations with such raillery, or construct them upon such instinct for character, as we notice in the scene where she amuses Nerissa with those sketches of her various lovers' foibles. What does such a woman want for tools, — pencil, brush, goose-quill, or tribune? She is made to have her choice of occupations. Does she have a call to utter the great truths of morals and religion? Undoubtedly, Nature has ordained her. Therefore, thou Reverend D.D., with all respect for dulness which is miraculous, that pulpit where you labor like a vessel water-logged is wanted: we people in the pews are faint with emptiness on board your craft, and despair of making any harbor. Persuade him, O Portia, to cede that domain to you: we would fain have the droppings of the sanctuary like the gentle dew from heaven upon the earth beneath.

Here is another Daniel come to judgment! We would say, let another judge's seat be placed for her, if we did not observe that it was love which enlisted her wit to screen the friend of her lover. Here again Shakspeare has derived her public attitude from the emotions which her sex involves: the triumph of the court-room is a stratagem inspired by inclination. In a panel of jurors, how many women we should have to challenge on the ground of unfitness by reason of the element which makes up every verdict of our life! She is disqualified

by that exquisite superiority. Her private feeling is liable to be so profoundly interested that sometimes she acquits or condemns, not as a judge, but as a person. Her element, which attains to equilibrium in the world's broad atmosphere, might, if condensed into the Leyden jar of a court-room, explode with singular effects. Upon the bench it might happen that she would make our bail too light, or refuse it altogether. By common consent, Justice has always been a woman; but it was found necessary to blindfold her, that she may not see into which scale to throw a heart.

But this heart of woman, so liable to hurried action, is the centre of her bravest and least calculated gestures. Her profession is that of heroine. Wherever it be natural to recoil, she flouts Nature and declines the job of shrinking. Portia and Helena might be two sisters of the healing art, gratefully welcomed by their own sex's modesty, but self-possessed and prompt wherever suffering tears down the pales of convention; sisters of mercy, hunting after wounds in the rear of battle, dressing maimed soldiers down the sighing wards of hospitals, appalled at no hurt the most hideous, repelled by no festering squalor; the mates of man in courage and dexterity. Let a university be founded for their training.

What shall a Portia undertake to do? That which is level to Portia's capacity. *Must* she do it? That is as she herself may decide. But we let our women do the dirty drudgery of kitchens, expose themselves to the publicity of saloons, grow sallow and stooping over spin-

dles, and spend all day dodging poverty behind a counter. We pay our money to see them exercise their various talents on the stage, where no exigency of the plot surprises us, no shifts of costume seem inappropriate, no want of it amazing. Oh, we gentlemen are such sticklers for propriety, so interested to keep our women well sequestered! She must not speak in public, but she may sing: Jenny Lind's open mouth does not look indecent, but Lucretia Mott's is an outrage of our modesty! Where will you draw a line through the crowd of competent intelligences? I would draw it very quickly by putting cleverness in the place of dulness, though many a preacher and schoolmaster, many a vapid lecturer, would have to budge. Why should inferiority in a swallow-tail be so valued and protected against superiority in skirts? Napoleon said, "Careers are open to talents;" but he dreaded lively and gifted women, and got them out of the country, wisely suspecting that their insight would fathom his weakness. But no country can flourish till the talents and morals of women mix with its affairs. I cannot see why dulness is more respectable in a man than in a woman. Does it hurt our feelings more to see a woman fail in any public attitude than to see a man do it? No doubt it does; for we cannot entirely disenchant those youthful reveries in which woman, though so close to us, seemed to hover upon an unapproachable horizon, a shape that commanded loyalty from our sense of harmony and proportion, — nothing in excess, nothing in defect; an embodiment of a perfect tone's vibration that thrilled in

our ideal of life and promised it a future. We could not tolerate any discrepancy with the allurement of this mystery. Our own sexual distinction enhanced it to the pitch of astonishment and reverence. We could not bear to see her clothed and adorned in a way to jar the taste which she first woke in us. We cannot bear it now. No pretext of convenience in locomotion, whether by horseback, rail, steamer, velocipede, or mangle, can rub out of our preference the lines which trace the reserve that protects our youthful dream. And how can this being, only half suggested yet clearly not ourselves, put a scrawl of crudity in place of those fluent curves that describe something less angular than we are? The gestures of her mind, when they are publicly displayed to throw a glove into the mob of us from the edge of a platform, must always indorse our preconception. Any thing harsh, some acidity of tone, sentences that stride or bandy with arms akimbo, will pique the unconverted world into taking up her glove to crush and not to kiss. So we cannot bear to see a woman pushed forward into premature expression which the gift will not confirm. A man's stupidity does not inflict so great a hurt on our imagination. Distance doth breed divinity; and we shrink to find a woman capable of dulness, and yet able to show it. All this may be conceded to be a natural instinct which men will not abandon. But its root is in regard for woman; so that men should be the first to sound a trumpet before the lists to champion her genius, whatever it may be, and to see that fair play is enforced in the tournament. Shall the gifted woman enter the

lists? Let her poverty, if not her preference, consent and decide.

But a woman, however poor she may be, and burdened with claims upon her relationship, cannot try to do what Portia did not need to do unless her talent can justify the attempt. If she presumes upon the deference which man spontaneously pays to her sex, or calculates that curiosity will be piqued to see her exhibition, she cannot, even with the help of her natural allies, flowers, costume, and manner, long conceal some inadequacy for the part she aspires to play. Then she will wreak discredit upon the independence of woman; and, if that be the special cause which she advocates, her presence on the platform will be an advertisement of its failure. For mankind, which has invented the motto for woman which styles her the weaker sex, does not like to be taken at its word, and will not sit patiently where this weakness bores it. It withdraws into the retreats where this accredited weakness is a delight and power. Of course, wherever masculine ineffectiveness appears, men are put out by it, except in a meeting-house; and there it is tolerated in deference to numerous tea-drinkings, marriages and funerals, and hours of pastoral gentleness; and the imminent inadequacy of speech is arrested by the organ. But the platform has neither tradition nor liturgy: the gaze of the audience is a *mitrailleuse* that sweeps it. There is no rose-window to throw a tint on bloodless speech. Men compromise no truth of their own, and damage no cause when they refrain from listening; for man is already the proprietor of all that he desires, and more

than he deserves. This is not the case with woman, — not, at least, in the regions where there are too many mouths and too scanty subsistence; nor in those where cultivated women cherish an interest in equality of opportunities; nor in those where the public law discriminates against them; nor in those where woman dislikes the liberty to be taxed without the right to vote upon the taxing. It is all the more incumbent upon women to be jealously careful that their self-respect, at least, should be adequately represented. They defeat their own thought when they applaud the thin speech which sometimes lends its want of voice to it. It is a "childish treble" that "pipes and whistles in its sound." There is no reason, because its piping and whistling were never tolerated before, that the new chance should confer immunity upon it. The liberty of later times must not be, for either sex, an unchartered libertine. Truth, eternal nature, the laws of mind and the moods of feeling, combine to take a mortgage upon it, whose interest must be paid in coin that is accepted as legal tender by the gifts that hold it. Recognizing this, perhaps the time will come when a superior womanhood shall remand masculine incapacity swiftly to the oblivion it deserves, whenever it mars blocks of marble, squanders paint, debauches music, or drones an absurd bass about God, Religion, and the awful morals. Pray Heaven to have woman restrained from the dilettantism of modern times!

When Portia's heart unties the spasm of joy that tightened round it at Bassanio's choice, it beats again with the grave and sweet dignity that is as native to her

as her playful wit. Her mind recognizes the serious change that must befall her fortune: in the first moment of it there comes a deep humility that makes her speech kneel at the feet of the man whom she will marry. For her great superiority is free from the taint of conceit, save "a noble and a true conceit of godlike amity."

We sometimes discover that gifted women are over-consciously aware of the effect which they produce. While we admire the iris on the peacock's neck, a bridling runs through it as if to set the colors in a better light, and our attention is divided by the motion. The orator's greatest gift is self-absorption. It strips his person to clothe his thought. His morals seem to gather luminosity out of the air, to become visible to men. The moment that the speaker listens to his own words, and snatches time between them to make the audience captive to his little private ovation, the people are less absorbed, begin to study the cut of his garments, and nod to each other how well they fit. Then the thought that was beginning to condense goes back like Ariel to the elements. When a woman's excellence reads on our faces that it is delightful, and begins also to be delighted, it throws a shadow: as we stand in it she seems less chaste than we thought her. All of Portia's talents share the inviolable reserve of her person, which seems to convey its modesty into the unspoken thought. How adorable is her humility! —

> "You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
> . . . an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd:

> Happy in this, she is not yet so old
> But she may learn ; and happier than this,
> She is not bred so dull but she can learn ;
> Happiest of all, in that her gentle spirit
> Commits itself to yours to be directed,
> As from her lord, her governor, her king."

Does this language seem to you slavish and old-fashioned? And do you, madam, declare that you never saw the man yet for whom you would so demean yourself? Then I shall know that just at present you are not in love. Perhaps you never have been; for it is the perfect language of a woman's first hours which follow love's declaration, when she feels that her life and soul are to be made complete by marriage. She storms herself with questions never before suggested. What could he see in her? What has she got with which to repay this exquisite flattery, this shuddering delight at being summoned out of millions of her sex? The first impulse is to spill the soul in a libation to the deity of the hour: let the whole of it drench my lover; let me not dare to reserve a portion to teach me a first selfish lesson. All, all is yours, my king! Come, drain it at the chalice of my lips!

An emotion far shallower than this is quite enough in any age to trump up a marriage with; but it is a funeral bak'd meat growing colder still at the wedding-breakfast. It is often frozen stiff before it gets there. Half-ripened girls fancy that their simmering preference will have the sunburst of love; but the blossom is still in its sheath: when it matures, that first greenness is pushed off. But, if it was rubbed off, the blossom, exposed to unseason-

able air, grows rusty, and lifts up a vapid invitation to some splendor to nod and mingle sweets. Shakspeare has no language of conventional avowal: no acceptances that are inspired by respect, calculation, immaturity, acquaintanceship, water his page with insipidity. His pen is love's shaft, and always has somebody's blood upon the tip.

So do not include Portia's sublime deference in your modern programme of reform. Man would grow less worthy of woman, less obedient to her inspirations, if that fell into disrepute. It is the first unstudied stratagem of love, — one that so humbles man into a greater deference that she can no longer call him lord. She listens in turn to his emotion: every line lifts her into equality, with the gesture that kings make when they acknowledge: —

> "Madam, you have bereft me of all words,
> Only my blood speaks to you in my veins;
> And there is such confusion in my powers,
> As after some oration, fairly spoke
> By a beloved prince, there doth appear
> Among the buzzing pleased multitude;
> Where every something, being blent together,
> Turns to a wild of nothing, save of joy,
> Express'd, and not express'd."

This is the quality in Shakspeare's courtships which convinces us that all his marriages will turn out happily. And he makes it plain in all his plays that he is a devotee of marriage. Portia is quite competent to lead a single life, and might earn a brilliant living if fate stripped her of wealth. Being without a particle of ambition, she would have to be driven by poverty into

setting up housekeeping with her gifts. But no woman is fine enough to persuade Nature to grant her exemption from the pain of love. There will always be exceptions, — an Olympia Morata, a Cassandra Fédélé, Florence Nightingale, Harriet Martineau, Maria Mitchell, Clara Barton, — natures of great constancy, who are absorbed in scholarship, poesy, or good works, with a temperament that has an even graciousness toward all men, and just pauses short of honoring one exclusively. Or, perhaps, the genius of such women was the gradual rally of time around an early disappointment, whose story never will be told, when something baffled a first love, — as the pearl-oyster, stimulated by some foreign substance that has intruded into its retreat, slowly coats it all over with nacre, till beauty incorporates the secret ill. Man covets it, but can never fix the date when the trouble of a fine soul began to revenge itself so nobly.

Still, it gives us pleasure when the best gifts are surprised, captured, seized away to consecrate privacy and become a fount of noble inheritance. Their publicity shall thrill and elevate a later age.

"When virtue leaps high in the public fountain, you seek for the lofty spring of nobleness, and find it far off in the dear breast of some mother, who melted the snows of winter, and condensed the summer's dew into fair, sweet humanity, which now gladdens the face of man in all the city streets."

Or if, in middle life, some truth, some moral, claims a woman's hand, and offers second marriage, men will gladly listen to a tone whose grave, sweet temper,

pitched by first love and married happiness, pervades all her experience.

So Portia, who could, when it was needed, "turn two mincing steps into a manly stride," doffs the lawyer's robe, and, returning, is met by music and conducted to a palace that was not till then a home.

HELENA; OPHELIA.

HELENA.

THE character of Helena, in "All's Well that Ends Well," furnishes a striking contrast to Ophelia, and tempts the student of Shakspeare to bring both types of womanhood into one field of view. Ophelia loves the Lord Hamlet, who is her "expectancy and rose of the fair state," — one to be proud of, cling to, and adore. But, when her father's interference begins to draw her into the contrary current which sweeps her life away, she develops no power of resistance. Even her love is not strong enough to stem the stream that rushes suddenly from subterranean caves to cover her feet and climb to her heart. She has no will for withstanding her father's resolution: her passion has not yet ventured out of its girlish stage, to gather strength and be a threat to her docility. She submissively returns the Prince's cherished words and presents, lets the old father rule her, and goes crazed.

But Helena, though also loving one above her rank, being only a physician's daughter, cannot bear the idea of giving up Count Bertram. Her love is not at first returned; but she contains love enough to furnish both hearts, and she actually follows him to court, to make a captive of him, hoping to light a mutual flame. Such a procedure as that stood not within the capacity of Ophelia. No doubt it offends our conventional feeling;

so that Helena must not only succeed, but manifest pure and noble qualities on the strange road she takes toward success, if she would gain our sympathy. The play begins quite early to canvass for our favor by showing that she is a noble woman who proceeds thus, and it is in the interest of a love that intends to be pure and legal. It is death to be without Bertram; and love will dare all things, risk life itself, to save the life of love. Why not in a woman as well as in a man? Nay, more likely in her case, for that special reason of womanhood, that positive instinct to be dependent, and to find life at once swallowed up and blessed by something or some person outside of Self. A modern woman, who desires to be independent, is eager to find something upon which she may depend. The Self of the average woman does not really subsist and reach perfect consciousness until the lover makes the claim of another Self upon it. For that which at first appears to be a threat of absorption, annihilation of the individual, turns out to be the bliss of being rendered back. It is only by the loss of mere individuality that an immortal person is established.

What kind of a woman is this one who sallies forth to turn a man into a husband? Shakspeare endows her with natural traits so positive that they claim no repose, are contented with no proficiency, and continually project improvement. "Her dispositions she inherits, which make fair gifts fairer; for where an unclean mind carries virtuous qualities, there commendations go with pity, they are virtues and traitors too; in her they are

the better for their simpleness ; she derives her honesty, and achieves her goodness." That is to say, not content with being well-born into an amiable disposition, she meditates the career of character. Such a mind allied with purity justifies itself, and can venture behavior which a weak person would be wrecked upon ; in whom, therefore, the attempt would be culpable. Conventional manners are the haven within whose breakwater the weak ride at safety, where nothing tests and strains their shallow build. When Helena goes to court on the pretext that the King's malady can be cured by a prescription that her dying father confided to her, the King, who prefers male doctors, puts her off and undervalues her capacity ; but she persists with a sincerity so sparkling, a tone so prompt and clear, a will so hard to repulse, that the King perceives no ordinary woman : —

> "Methinks, in thee some blessed spirit doth speak
> His powerful sound within an organ weak :
> And what impossibility would slay
> In common sense, sense saves another way.
> Thy life is dear ; for all that life can rate
> Worth name of life, in thee hath estimate,
> Youth, beauty, wisdom, courage, honor, all
> That happiness and prime can happy call."

So this ennobled daughter of a doctor aspires to wed the noble son of a countess. Shakspeare attacks the social etiquette of his own age and of all secluded circles. Helena should be filled with grief for the father lately dead ; but her "imagination carries no favor in it, but only Bertram's."

> "I am undone : there is no living, none,
> If Bertram be away. It were all one,

> That I should love a bright, particular star,
> And think to wed it, he is so above me:
> In his bright radiance and collateral light
> Must I be comforted, not in his sphere."

Then she gives a touch of woman's petulance at being so ensnared: —

> "'Twas pretty, though a plague,
> To see him every hour; to sit and draw
> His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls,
> In my heart's table, — heart too capable
> Of every line and trick of his sweet favor."

How frank and strong is the expression of her love! The lines are chiselled by a delicate distinctness: they suggest her profile. The verse has the high instep of a woman who can be haughty enough to crush the blossoms of this new, surprising sentiment.

She does not half listen to the gossip of Parolles. It is the absent Bertram who is drawing her thoughts to wander in the distance, to be in imagination for him

> "A thousand loves,
> His jarring concord, and his discord dulcet,
> His faith, his sweet disaster."

It is a pity "that wishing well had not a body in 't."

Now as Parolles departs, saying, "Get thee a good husband, and use him as he uses thee," Helena shows us the originality of her character by compelling love, that is usually of a habit so timid and retiring, to put it off and become adventurous. She chides the weakness of sitting still to mope and be macerated by passion. Something must be done to justify and consecrate it, to vindicate Nature's scope: she already claims Bertram

by divine sanction of her feeling. No matter whether he knows it or not, she knows he is that other part of her which her clear soul misses; and Fate shall not be pardoned if it leaves her less whole and rounded than she ought to be. Hitherto she is but half a person, and that half is disabled at the discovery. Love fills her with this rebuke of incompleteness, till she cannot tolerate thus being half-born into the world. When love takes hold of such determined minds, who are capable of willing and well endowed to confirm the will in action, the feminine traits acquire a bravery which inspires an invention not inconsistent with womanhood. She must find some way to reach the court, and put love's halo round his person: perhaps it will be absorbed and mingle with his blood. When the heart pronounces strongly, its meaning is sure to gather on the countenance and lend to conduct the purple of victory. So Helena will not have a secret, to prey like a worm upon the damask buds of all her youth. "Fortune," she said, "was no goddess, that had put such difference betwixt their two estates; love, no god, that would not extend his might only where qualities were level." She will not risk leaving the business to Heaven, and sit half made up till Providence may by chance observe her plight.

> "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie
> Which we ascribe to Heaven: the fated sky
> Gives us free scope; only, doth backward pull
> Our slow designs, when we ourselves are dull.
> Impossible be strange attempts to those
> That weigh their pains in sense, and do suppose
> What hath been cannot be."

Still, with all this venturesome disposition to help the piecing-out of destiny, she is a true woman, who must relapse from the boldest project into the secret humility of loving, and of looking up to the orb around which the heart revolves. And how honest she is! for she had a father whose "skill was almost as great as his honesty." So she acknowledges her passion to Bertram's mother, as if to let us see that her action is not a plot, and her motive nothing short of womanly.

> "I follow him not
> By any token of presumptuous suit;
> Nor would I have him, till I do deserve him;
> Yet never know how that desert should be.
> . . . Thus, Indian-like,
> Religious in mine error, I adore
> The sun, that looks upon his worshipper,
> But knows of him no more."

In this admirable scene, the Countess does not repel, but rather seems to undertake the part of Nature's good-will for any love that is real enough and full enough for two.

> "Even so it was with me when I was young:
> If we are Nature's, these are ours; this thorn
> Doth to our rose of youth rightly belong:
> Our blood to us, this to our blood is born;
> It is the show and seal of Nature's truth,
> Where love's strong passion is impress'd in youth."

Nature is not a member of society, and pays small heed to the prescriptions of a set. She does not ponder dowries and settlements, nor hunt up the title-deeds of clothes and houses; and does not snuff up the wedding-breakfast across the sacrament that mixes the blood of two hearts.

"Strange is it, that our bloods
Of color, weight, and heat, pour'd all together,
Would quite confound distinction, yet stand off
In differences so mighty:
. . . . Good alone
Is good without a name."

It has not yet occurred to Bertram that Helena entertains for him an affection which he might duplicate. When he departs for the court, he only says to her, "The best wishes that can be forged in your thoughts be servants to you," little conscious how implicitly they would serve her. His soul is preoccupied with the image of Maud, the fair daughter of Lafeu.

"I stuck my choice upon her, ere my heart
Durst make too bold a herald of my tongue."

Beyond her beauty there stretched a long perspective of contempt for all other women. Maud was too near to him, and blocked up the outlets of each eye, that no glances might get forth to scour the region which was so fruitful with Helena, to forage for her heart and gather it, —

"Thence it came,
That she, whom all men prais'd, and whom myself,
Since I have lost, have lov'd, was in mine eye
The dust that did offend it."

He is at first superior in rank and inferior in nature, his blood and virtue contending for empire in him. She is still the woman whom Nature has elected for him, notwithstanding his surprise and contempt when she summons him out of the crowd of courtiers in pursuance of the boon she had craved of the King, if he recovered by the use of her prescriptions. In her the voice of

Nature spoke more truly than Bertram's passing inclination. As she claims the precious fee, the blushes in her cheeks whisper, —

> "We blush that thou shouldst choose: but, be repuls'd,
> Let the white death sit on thy cheek for ever;
> We'll ne'er come there again."

Bertram feigns compliance with the wishes of the King; but, determining to get rid of her, he hurries from the marriage rite to the Florentine wars. There was a technical marriage of two persons who are not yet wedded, for he does not yet deserve her. The shadow of her plebeian origin is large enough to obscure her merit; so that poetic justice requires that he must wait till she is appreciated, when he will find that he has gained every thing in yielding every thing to the supremacy of pure womanhood. He flings himself away to the wars, exclaiming, "Till I have no wife, I have nothing in France."

When she perceives that she is the cause of his expatriation, her decision is made to leave France, so that he may be free to enter it again. She becomes a pilgrim, with bared feet, to do penance for ambitious love, wandering here and there, keeping out of the way that he may be recalled from the dangers of war: —

> "He is too good and fair for death and me;
> Whom I myself embrace, to set him free."

By and by, Bertram, believing that she is dead, is overwhelmed with an access of love for her. His awakened conviction "cries to see what's done." Sup-

posing that she is departed, he finds that she is for the first time present. Although he has been full of faults, and does not hesitate to screen himself by the most ungentlemanly prevarications, there is a strain of his nature that sounded when he thought that death had snapped her string. The vibration woke the tone of Helena, and married him to her without a priest save death. "Sweet Helen's knell" became the joy-peals of her marriage morn. Then he receives his true patent of nobility; for her soul converts him to a man.

In this play, Shakspeare has followed the incidents of an old story; but, in doing so, Helena grew upon his hands to be so fine that we dislike to see her submit to a certain one of the circumstances of that borrowed plot. And we wonder that Shakspeare should not have shielded her by a better invention.

We are not satisfied to know that such incidents were very common in the novels of that day, whence Shakspeare derived many of his plots; for the greatest moments of his genius have taught us reverently to demand of him more than that he should be content to take the old threads and weave the old strand over. We expect to follow them as clews that lead through subtle labyrinths of Nature where the heart has stored its secrets. Whenever we venture with him on that raft of some light tale of Boccaccio, we are not surprised if we drop into deep water whose cresting waves admonish Shakspeare to brace and fortify the slim float he started on. We do not relish the idea that Shakspeare is mainly interested to work out a plot into a good act-

ing play, and so takes the nearest coarse things that may suit such a purpose. It is true they have been immersed till they are encrusted all over with his imagination, and their cheapness is concealed. The Chinese drop a shot into the shell of a pearl oyster, and by and by reclaim it all cased in an iris. It seems to be a drop distilled from many sunsets; but the kernel is still a shot. Shakspeare dips the coarse narratives of the Italian writers into his many-colored verse; and they are turned into necklaces to heave on the breath of fair women, and signet-rings to stamp the sense and sovereignty of manhood. But we expect of Shakspeare something more than cunning ornament. The splendor of his poetry does not dazzle us so that we cannot look for hidden meanings and transcendent allusions to the soul of things, as we so often find in him.

But in her character Shakspeare clearly rose to a conviction that love may put such emphasis upon a woman that she must declare herself, notwithstanding the tradition of the sex, that the man's love must have the opening word. Yet, upon reflection, have not women always spoken before men ask them? The shyest and most timorous heart that scuds to covert at every rustle of discovery has already put man upon its track. Some conniving hour has dropped a softer tone into the voice which she never heard from her own tongue before. It surprises her into a faint blush, and surprises him into a sudden observation; as when a new planet steps into the field of view, and startles the watcher with one more world. It was but a blush's shadow,

such as a bubble drops on the bed of a clear brook; but it goes athwart his eyes. As they look whence it came, he sees it has already pulled down the lids of hers and set them for a snare. She has spoken: she has made a declaration. With all the enterprise of Helena, she could not have advertised herself more fully.

There are many dialects and methods of expression; and every woman will instinctively pronounce her mother-tongue. From Viola to Helena stretches a whole chromatic scale of tones which do not transcend the holding bars. Helena was not a type anticipating some future of an inverted relation of the sexes, when, perhaps, even *seven* women might have Scripture for laying hold of one man. But she bravely testifies of woman the faculty of a love so sacred, and improvised by a heart so firm and true, so inspired with its own destiny, that she perceives through a man's indifference what a man so often perceives through hers, through a firmament barred by sullen cloud-racks, the clear heaven that will be corresponsive to the heart. Helena cannot be daunted by the weather. While the storm lasts, the upper blue is confided to her keeping against the next fine day. But we shall see Ophelia cower beneath the broken roof of reason, while the heart is too weak to shore it up against the wild pother that is breaking round her.

OPHELIA.

Looking across the intervale of our prosaic concerns, we descry the outlines of Hamlet, as they build on the

horizon a symmetry, enticing depth, weird masses, and a lonely top. We try to recognize the distinctions of this grand object which has been lifted there for ever to attract the curiosity of men. It is too remote to be minutely pictured: the shadows that apprise us of its deep seclusion veil the openings of paths by which it is to be explored. Stretches of a livelier color report to us the verdure and perfume of youth: the clouds that fling their pensive intervals upon it pass off pursued by gladness. But we perceive whole tracts that slope inwardly to sombreness where the fancy is interrupted by awe and vague surmise. Whither will those rifts lead us? Into what places visited by nothing human, whence we hurriedly return, looking back with a sense of some invisible pursuit, as if the forest shuddered with an adjuration which overtook, beneath the ground, our feet? What various latitudes are repeated along that height, with a zone for every season! It is shaped by all the weathers of the year: it groups within itself the smiles, the terrors, the fitful moods of Nature, and puts them into a distance of sublime effect.

While we are observing it, there grows thither, as if deposited out of the day, a softening tint; one hardly knows if it be light, or color, or a vapor, or how it be compounded of them all. But it envelops the whole outline, and spills over into every opening, a gracious refinement, an investiture not easily described, a light touch of gentle qualities which decline to be quoted in the dry list of the appraiser. It is the tender lady, the maiden with the delicate bloom of love and the remote-

ness of it, — the impalpable Ophelia. To detain and handle is impossible, not because, like some rare sphinx-moth, the downy wings flutter into hiding; for she is motionless as a stain of color, restful as a summer afternoon when all the noises sleep: she is a sentiment that broods without a stir upon the lofty Hamlet; she gives no sound to challenge your attention, and is unable to goad her exquisite reserve into any marked behavior. But this shyness is broad enough to cover Hamlet's variety all over, and does not let one of his features straggle beyond its subduing purple. She is the tone of the whole wide landscape that stretches between your soul and his. What need has she to multiply words, to intensify her shape upon the background of the action? Small need has she to borrow the saucy wit of Beatrice, to make up her lips with the pertness of Rosalind, or compress them with the firmness of Helena. They just suit the touch of Hamlet's lips when his unbend from gathering the speech of solemn thoughts She offers them, and his cloud empties of its density. She draws off the accumulated sparks of reason, makes him safe and domestic, steals into him with content that even he cannot measure, up to the time when a father's death untuned his prophetic soul. She will learn to prattle about flowers, but, alas! not steeped like Perdita, in glad midsummer; not to beguile her lord, but to deck the bride-bed of her fate. She wears her rue "with a difference." But, in the mean time, she may neglect Lord Hamlet's books, and keep her mind guiltless of entertaining views. She would have no fancy for going to

school of Portia, perhaps no taste to learn the "neat cookery" of Imogen. Her hands are well fashioned to soothe the hours when "the pale cast of thought" wishes to escape from itself into some fair, open nature, and to feel its flattery. Because she is not a character, she is a tune: she is

> "That old and antique song we heard last night."

The waters will soon pull "the poor wretch from her melodious lay to muddy death." So, for a while, let her be the mood she is, the sentiment that Heaven made her, to glint through palace-windows across the marble floors and gild Hamlet's high-strung nerves. That noble mind, —

> "The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,
> The observ'd of all observers," —

is not playing at the feet of a fatuous woman, with silly, pretty face, and bird-like chatter of a soulless brain, to marry that misery at last. Many a superior man ties such a bunch of plumage, with the minutest mouthful of a body inside of it, into his buttonhole; when it falls out, the tie drags it, feebly fluttering, across the ground. But Ophelia has an instinct deep enough to fathom "the courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword;" and he as instinctively surrenders his depths to that survey, which is none the less sufficing because it is so artless. No: it is all the more competent to correspond to his wide temper; the only ladyhood in the land for its only prince.

Fair flower, half-drooping, half-springing from a cleft in Elsinore's grim platform, where wafts of ghostly air shudder out of the midnight of the frosty ocean, and the fate-sisters who take the breath of heroes are at hand. At length the dreadful secret mingles with her fragrance, which then comes to us distempered. She does not know what has happened; but in the sudden death and private burial of her father, slain by her own lover, she, sitting amid the relics of a rejected love, listening across the "sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh" of her old lover's soul-chime, intuitively feels that there are

> "Tricks i' the world; and hems, and beats her heart;
> Spurns enviously at straws; speaks things in doubt,
> That carry but half sense."

With what a small outlay of dramatic contrivance has Shakspeare drawn the pathos of Ophelia's fate! It begins to infect us as soon as we discover that she loves; for her lover receives the visits of a murdered father. We know, but she does not, the cause of the apparent unsettling of the Prince's wits. We can anticipate into what tragedies that ghost beckons her Lord Hamlet, while she walks unconsciously so close that her garments, perfumed with rare ladyhood, brush the greaves of the grisly visitant. Her helplessness is not cast in a faint outline against the background of these palace treacheries and lusts; but it appears in startling vividness, because she is so pure, so remote from all the wicked world, so slenderly fitted out to contend with it. Tears are summoned when we see how simple she is,

and fashioned solely for dependence: a disposition, not a will; a wife for Hamlet's will, but poor to husband one of her own.

What will become of her? What becomes of the vine when lightning splits its oak? The clipping tendrils and soft green have lost their reason for existing when the wood which centuries have grained is blasted in an hour. She will shrink into herself, will sicken, grow sere, rustle to and fro. Her leaves will blab loose songs to every wanton wind. To wither is all that is left to do, since all that she could do was to love, to climb, to cling, to cloak ruggedness with grace, to make strength and stature serve to lift and develop all her beauteous quality.

She is free to love, yet bound by old-fashioned duty toward her father; and he belongs to the old fashion of supposing that a prince can only amuse himself, no matter what sweet protestations flow into her ear. She cannot believe it; nor, when her flighty brother serves her with long-winded cautions on the same subject, does she hardly seem to listen. Her answers are so short that she plainly does not share his solicitude. In fact, she is highly amused to see him play the prig with the consequential air which only a brother can assume. Between the lines there are peals of girlish laughter, not printed, as she turns upon him with the advice to take himself into custody. This amusement ripples through her retort:—

> "Good my brother,
> Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
> Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven;

Whilst, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede."

The old songs which Ophelia had picked up by no means decide that she was passionate enough to justify so much advice on the point. Some nurse who crooned over her, some book of old ballads, such as Autolycus might leave at the door, was responsible for the scraps which floated into her unconscious girlhood. It frequently happens to an unwary, half-developed youth that things not excessive in decorum get established in the memory. They are kept strenuously secret, unless something demoralizes the brain. When madness tears her modesty all to tatters, they escape, and wander without a rag of clothing through her talk. They do not betray that she was ever less than a true lady. She rebukes Hamlet during the mock play, when the expectation of unmasking the king ferments in him with the flightiest remarks, and his tongue rides a steeple-chase over the bounds of courtesy. She will not listen, and says to him, "You are naught, you are naught: I'll mark the play." However, she knows her lord to be a gentleman; for she has often silently felt the effluence of an honest man whose manners and morals were noble. She pays no consideration to the family caution.

It is noteworthy how Shakspeare defends Ophelia from our censure while she is chanting those free ditties of an olden time. We listen to them in company with the pitying King and Queen: the air seems to gather pity to tone the rude surprise. She was naturally full

of sensibility; so, when she enters in the first mad scene, entirely insensible to her misfortune, it both increases our sadness and calls upon us to create what should be her sane feeling. When that is done, the songs borrow all the chasteness of misfortune. We are absorbed in sorrow to see how distraction could violate her sacred privacy: thinking more of that than of the words, the coarseness eludes us. We are all bound up in the brother's feeling at this sight, who cries, —

> "O rose of May!
> Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia!"

And the King says, "How do you, pretty lady?" Yes, that she is, through it all. If she had her wits, and were using them to persuade us to revenge her, it could not move like these piteous, tender improprieties.

> "Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,
> She turns to favor and to prettiness."

For she sings without smirching a single petal of the daisies and pansies, which she so softly distributes, with such an appeal of forlornness, to bid their fragrance disinfect her language, or to speak for her in the natural key of her wonted maidenhood. So every heart exhales in the pity that plays the magic of distance and softens the unsightliness of her ruin.

Shakspeare has given most touchingly rational applications to her distribution of the flowers. The flowers themselves are culled in fancy: she holds no actual nosegay in her hand. She recalls, together with the long-unheeded songs, all that she learned in girlhood about

the symbolic meanings of flowers; and a light irony invests some of them. It is plain that the rosemary, for remembrance, is ideally bestowed upon Laertes, with pansies too: "A document in madness; thoughts and remembrance fitted." Rosemary was supposed to have the quality of strengthening the memory. The volatile Laertes will have need of it, and of as many thoughts as he can muster. The fennel ought to be handed to Horatio, and the columbines should be intended for the king: the one is a symbol of flattery and is exchanged among courtiers, but Horatio never learned the useful trade; the others are expressive of ingratitude and cuckoldom. Was Hamlet's father slain because of that? The columbines were earned betimes! There's rue for the queen; for she has great need of repentance. There's rue for herself too. Both need it; but the queen with a difference, as her moral condition differed from Ophelia's. We may call it an herb that leads to grace. There's a daisy. She recognizes it, but ought not to keep it for herself. And there is no other maiden present. It represents frivolous and light-thoughted girls. She would give Laertes some violets, if they had not all withered when his father died. These delicate allusions make us think that before the distraction set in Ophelia had inklings of the foul concerns around her. All the more hopeless, then, became the overthrow of reason.

Hamlet is too finely endowed to sport with her inclining maidenhood. She has no more calculation than a flower. She lets her beauty bend towards him without timidity; for she likes that he should sip the chalice

which he will not rudely shatter. After every visit he used to leave behind him a sense of honor which occupied her heart when his lips had ceased protesting. Yet she will defer to the father, with the instinct, perhaps, that more favorable dispositions will transpire. Polonius, the old stickler for the conventions of royalty, is thoroughly possessed with the idea that the Prince, from that point of view, cannot be intending marriage. Some over-subtle critics will have it that the old schemer is secretly chuckling over the idea that a match may be made, but that he dreads the king. If Hamlet can only be brought to the decisive point, and held there, the temper of the court will be of little consequence. But what method shall be employed with a prince who só loves to push off upon his moods of feeling to let them get unhitched and float him from corresponding facts? A double contrivance occurs to Polonius, — to protect his daughter from the possible waywardness of a prince, and to pique him into making a declaration of alliance. This is a delicate operation; for the king will jealously scrutinize his movements. It seems as if he was merely protecting his daughter, and keeping faith with his king, when he urges her not to receive the letters which besiege her door, nor to admit him any longer to her presence. Then the sly old rat, not yet gone to burrow behind the arras, hopes to gnaw into the King by attributing Hamlet's strange behavior to love for Ophelia. And he has so nicely arranged matters, by prohibiting letters and visits, that when the King, bending severe brows upon him, asks, "How hath she received his

love?" he can reply, with a flush of honor, "What do you think of me?"

I cannot find that the context will justify this theory. It is contradicted by the evident alarm and sorrow which the old man displays when Ophelia describes the piteous plight of Hamlet after his repulse; for what does Polonius know about a "father's spirit in arms" laying waste the Prince's soul? No: he must be deep in love; and Polonius must hasten to report it to the King.

We recur to the plain theory that Polonius supposes that a king's son is out of the star of her unaspiring thought, and that such a match would be against the stomach of the Court. He will cling to his lord chamberlain's staff and totter with it to the end. The daughter, respecting his fears, inflicts this harsh repulse upon Hamlet. How we pity the Prince, who is turned away from her dear house whither he would have longed to repair, weighed down with his awful secret, to place his heart upon her restfulness, and let its rhythm soothe the cracking nerves! Yet she "did return his letters, and denied his access," perhaps the very morning after he had sworn the platform oath. There's nothing to depend on left in Denmark. Who next is false? What truth or feeling escapes the monstrous irony?

But mark how quickly Ophelia's love jumps at the father's plan to bring them again together, as if by accident, in order that the King and he may observe, by the nature of the interview, whether he is mad from love of her. And when he thrusts a book into her hand, that she may have the pretence of reading when Hamlet

enters, she gladly adopts the whole device; for has she not just heard the Queen confess that she hopes Hamlet loves her?

> "For your part, Ophelia, I do wish
> That your good beauties be the happy cause
> Of Hamlet's wildness; so shall I hope your virtues
> Will bring him to his wonted way again,
> To both your honors."

Can she believe her ears? Hamlet's own mother hopes, as she afterwards confessed directly above Ophelia's grave, that she may become the wife of Hamlet. Then all the scruples of Laertes and her father are groundless. However indisposed the King may feel to such a match, she has a suitor in the heart of the mother. Welcome the opportunity, welcome any stratagem, even that of taking his remembrances from her bosom, to have them returned to her, — a woman's wile to receive them back more rich than ever with smiles of a recovered love.

The more common theory is that Ophelia does not suspect the mother's inclination for such a marriage. The Queen's language is guarded, and capable of two interpretations; but she spoke in the presence of the King. Measure the extent of her meaning by the depth of Ophelia's grave. Still, it is commonly thought that Ophelia understands the Queen to expect of her to make Hamlet realize the hopelessness of his passion, trusting to have his disorder dismissed with his love. In that case, she is merely yielding to the father's suggestion that these remembrances of his shall be re-

turned; and the old plotter has arranged this for the King to witness. Filial deference cannot stoop lower than this sad enforcement; but her whole life has been the non-assertion of a will. She,

> "Of ladies most deject and wretched,
> That suck'd the honey of his music vows,"

and who longed to

> "Bring him to his wonted way again,"

is still so docile, so subject to the pervading influence of her father's house, that she declares to Hamlet she has wished for a long time to redeliver his gifts and letters, "of so sweet breath composed." And when we hear her say,

> "To the noble mind,
> Rich gifts wax poor, when givers prove unkind,"

we have a glimpse of the interview that was brought on by him when, as she was sewing in her chamber, he forced himself into her presence, in disordered dress, and with a manner as if he would dismiss her from his heart. It wounded and distressed her:—

> "Oh, woe is me!
> To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!"

It need not seem unnatural that the fair girl is so obsequious to the father's will. We find no mother in the house: she is gone, and the only daughter and only son transfer their love of a mother to the bereaved father, and cling to him with a devotion that includes a special submissiveness. They live very much withdrawn into themselves, and mutually dependent. The gentle

daughter consults in her solitude the wishes and humors, even the whims, of the father, whose capacity for giving sound advice she perceives to have greatly aged. She loves to be retired within the old mansion, whose still life suits a maiden shyness. We come upon her sewing in her chamber, thinking of Hamlet.

> "As patient as the female dove,
> When that her golden couplets are disclos'd,"

she sits drooping in silence, remembering her lord, but remembering too that, when her father pooh-poohed her talk about the Prince's affection for her, and bade her look out for herself, she sighed and said, "I shall obey, my lord." She is very much absorbed in contriving solace for a lonely father. So, when she learns that he has been killed, and that the blow was dealt by Hamlet, by what freak of accident she cannot understand, — but "a young maid's wits" prove to be "as mortal as an old man's life," — the daughter suddenly empties every thing out of her heart except affection for the cherished, fatuous old father: her love for Hamlet is spilled out through that rent in the arras, as we can notice when all her pretty, distracted singing yields not a tone that might be an echo of the sweet episode in her poor little life. For otherwise, when madness broke up her maidenly reserve, and permitted us to pry into the dispositions of her soul, we ought to have found there a love for Hamlet as deeply seated as devotion to a father; but it never was so deep, and never had time enough to surmount all other considerations. Therefore the sad wanderings bury the father over and over again, finding a fresh grave for him each time: —

"He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone;
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.
White his shroud as the mountain snow,
Larded with sweet flowers;
Which bewept to the grave did go,
With true-love showers."

"We must be patient; but I cannot choose but weep to think they should lay him in the cold ground. My brother shall know of it;" and on the strength of that she culls out rosemary for him.

"They bore him bare-fac'd on the bier,
And in his grave rain'd many a tear;

Fare you well, my dove!" says this loyal daughter. We echo it, but with a difference: she is this dove to whom we bid farewell. For already "in the distance one white arm is seen above the tide," clutching at the branches of a willow growing askant a brook; and our pulse premeditates the funeral strain that goes graveward while her Prince is looking "at the skull as though Death had written on it the history of man."

Poor maiden, to be churlishly suspected of making an end of herself, when we know that "an envious sliver broke" and let her into that coffin strewn with flowers, — the tributes, not to womanhood in its capacity to resolve, to outlive destiny, to outdo circumstance with patience, to contrive escapes from disaster, but simply "sweets to the sweet," turned as they were to immortal amaranths when Hamlet's breath endowed them: —

"I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers
Could not, with all their quantity of love,
Make up my sum."

Then, too late for her, but not for us, to atone for her chariness of language and action, all her gifted simplicity is revealed to justify the silent past and to ennoble Hamlet for his heart's choice of such an unambitious soul. What freighted her might have kept Hamlet riding on a steady keel upon any ocean that was not phantom-haunted. Death casts up her freight underneath the cliffs of this stern tragedy, and we are wreckers all along the shore to recover strays from the sail that love had chartered.

When the procession enters the churchyard, Hamlet steps aside to be unperceived. There is not a trait in this scene which does not illustrate Ophelia's character, and reflect a tender worth upon it. Hamlet wonders who it is, what person of estate whom they follow, "and with such maimèd rites." When Laertes steps forward, Hamlet praises him to Horatio. This deepens our feeling of his unconsciousness that it is a brother who is burying that beloved sister. 'Tis our common fashion of noting, with slightly raised sympathy, the mourners in a train that bears away nothing particularly dear to us. "What ceremony else?" Nothing more: the stubborn old priest will not venture his own salvation on another word for her whose "death was doubtful." Where he got that notion does not appear in the play. It is like Malcolm's crotchet that Lady Macbeth took herself off "by self and violent hands." But notions are the sheet-anchors of formalists. The priest drops his, swings round, and becomes immovable. He complains, with the whine of a man who has been imposed upon,

that "here she is allow'd her virgin crants, her maiden strewments," and even a bell! If the sour old ritualist could have had his way, he would have pitched "shards, flints, and pebbles" over her. It is not only pity which increases, but respect, with every line: it takes her part, and magnifies her nature. There must have been more of her than we used to think. So, when the requiem is denied, Laertes pronounces it for all when he says, —

"A minist'ring angel shall my sister be,"

as she always had been. And our sentiment recalls the dominant excellence of her character. If ever the priest himself should come to grief, and lie howling in that place which is paved with good intentions and bad practices, she would be the first to toss him a sprig of "herb o' grace o' Sundays."

When Laertes lets fall the word "sister," Hamlet appears to utter nothing but ordinary surprise, — "What! the fair Ophelia?" — and his action goes no further. Some critics have inferred, from this absence of manifested emotion, that Hamlet never really loved Ophelia, and that his subsequent passionate outbreak was only inspired by pique at seeing Laertes take on so with leaping into the grave as if to fill it with hyperboles of language. It is said that, at the very instant of hearing her name, a lover would have exclaimed bitterly, would have rushed forward into the funeral group to agitate its grief afresh with his own, would have sunk into some gesture of abandonment. Romeo might have improvised such a scene, but Hamlet was a different style of

lover: he was always "ill at such numbers." His emotion smouldered underneath all the refinements of intellect and conscience, and rarely gleamed through the scruples of his will. When it did gain a moment's mastery, as in that scene of surrendering love, —

> "He raised a sigh so piteous and profound,
> That it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
> And end his being,"

it palsied the tongue, and only advertised itself in the pathetic eyes which fell to such perusal of Ophelia's face, "and to the last bended their light" on her.

Let us try to conceive the situation at the grave. Hamlet has been absent in England during Ophelia's distraction. Returning, he strolls into a churchyard, amuses himself with the old grave-digger, withdraws aside when the train approaches, so as not to be recognized by the King. Then comes the discovery that Ophelia is dead. There was always in Hamlet's brain that time allowed for the transit of a message between his feeling and his deed. The line connected with a great many intermediate tracts, in each of which there was delay. Nothing but an unsyllabled fluid of conjecture passed all along the way. Dead? How? Was that glad girl the one to take her own life? Why? There was just time enough for him to hear that confession of his mother, —

> "I hop'd thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife."

What a remembrance, extorted from death, of the old love that he never could conceal from the mother's

instinct which was so fond and clear! He listens thus to despair reclaiming former hopes, and it draws his spirit backward, so that the body cannot move and the tongue dare not break this sacred silence of his retrospection. Therefore, Laertes has plenty of time to rant like Pistol in a tavern. His exaggerated action plunges into the grave of Hamlet's reverie and breaks it up. The Prince is forced into disgust at hearing a man vaunt love against his own. All scruples are shrivelled up in anger; and he instinctively assumes the tone he hears. The old ironical disgust for sham makes the imitation perfect. Afterward, to Horatio, he acknowledges that he forgot himself: —

> "But, sure, the bravery of his grief did put me
> Into a towering passion."

And this passion broke open his respect and prudence, and let loose the first cry of his love that had ever reached the ears of others. Else it would have lain buried with Ophelia in the silence of her lover's breast.

It was too much, — to discover at such a moment what used to be his mother's expectations; to see the sprinkling of those flowers that should have been for marriage; to have the old conviction return, that marriage was impossible for him, — a man whose bed, watched by a ghost, could have no other tenant; to recall how he ousted love, that revenge might occupy. It was too much for this heart of sensitive and noble strain to see the dead girl, and catch through the rant of Laertes that her prince had indirectly caused her death. His solid

flesh could not melt: the coffin chilled it. But how long could he listen to this man, whose affected furor showed him to be a person incapable of deep passion? It fans all that smoulders in him into smoke and flame. In the rage of a temperament whose trick it always was to baffle itself, and in the bitterness of being reminded by her cold beauty that he had had to surrender it while it was too young to die, — it is too masterful. He bursts into Laertes's vein with its own style, —

> "Nay, an thou'lt mouth,
> I'll rant as well as thou,"

but soon checks himself with a half apology, and subsides.

How mobile and impressible he was, notwithstanding his large capacity of reason! The latter aided him to dissimulate and to keep his projects waiting; but the other traits nourished a fancy that easily turned to mimicry of whatever was transpiring; as when he assumed, half-consciously, the dandified phrasing of Osric, and played with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. This plastic fancy jumped to the high stilts of Laertes, and it stalked to "make Ossa like a wart."

But his bosom secret has escaped. He turns away, is followed by Horatio, to whom, before the next scene opens, we hear him (though no folio nor quarto ever lisped a syllable of it) pouring out the confidences of a fruitless passion to the only honest man of all the crowd, the still and trusty comrade. This Shakspeare would have us understand, I think, by giving Hamlet to say to Horatio, as they enter the next scene together, "So

much for this, sir." So much for what? we think. Then it dawns upon us that the only other interest of the moment must have been Ophelia's death.

And we recollect that Horatio was absent at the time of her death, having gone to meet Hamlet near the sea-coast. So both of them were ignorant of the occurrence. But now Horatio has been making inquiries during the time that elapses between the burial and the next scene. He picks up all the particulars, and has been detailing to the eager Hamlet all that we know. And Hamlet's entry upon the next scene is timed exactly when Horatio has ceased narrating. There is nothing more to tell. Hamlet enters, saying, "So much for this, sir. Now you shall see the other." That is, I will relate what has happened to me also, and how a divinity has shaped my ends to this return. And his brief life is claimed again by the native land on which a ghost has left the tracks of a murder; for great Heaven has not yet hunted it down. So

> "Lay her i' the earth;
> And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
> May violets spring,"

to renew the breed which withered with the death of her father.

MACBETH.

MACBETH.

IT is the opinion of Fleay that "'Macbeth,' in its present state, is an altered copy of the original drama, and the alterations were made by Middleton." Thomas Middleton wrote twenty-three plays. Among them was "The Witch," written, perhaps, in 1613, and published in 1617. Shakspeare's "Macbeth" was first played in 1606. It appears in the Folio of 1623 for the first time in print, as a more finished acting copy than the other plays. The divisions of acts and scenes and the stage directions are carefully marked. The death of Shakspeare occurred in 1616. It is possible that Middleton was the person who prepared the Folio copy of "Macbeth." Scarce a trace, however, of his own style can be suspected; for there is only occasionally a verbal similarity of the charms and incantations employed in "Macbeth" and "The Witch" of later date. In Act iii. 5, the burden of the song, "Come away, come away," and, in Act iv. 1, the song, "Black spirits," &c., are to be found in "The Witch:" the latter is merely indicated as a stage direction in "Macbeth." In Act i. 1, we are reminded of Middleton in "I come, Graymalkin!"* and "Paddock calls." He may have shoved his "Malkin" into that first chant of the witches, and

* *Grau Mariechen:* Malkin is endearing diminutive for Mary: the cat is Little Gray Mary.

spoiled its metre. But although the introduction of Hecate, in Act iii. 5, is said to be not Shakspearean enough in relevancy to the play, it is altogether too Shakspearean in style for Middleton, who never could have written, —

> "Great business must be wrought ere noon:
> Upon the corner of the moon
> There hangs a *vaporous drop profound;*
> I'll catch it ere it come to ground:
> And that, distill'd by magic sleights,
> Shall raise such artificial sprites
> As by the strength of their illusion
> Shall draw him on to his confusion."

And we must notice that Hecate thus introduces and accounts for the "artificial sprites," — the apparitions which deceive Macbeth in Act iv. 1, and entice him to "be bloody, bold, and resolute." This scene is certainly Shakspeare's. It is therefore probable that he would have preceded it by some inkling of the deceptive nature of the armed head, the bloody child, and the child crowned.

On the ground of an apparently un-Shakspearean style of metre in Act i. 2, which introduces the wounded sergeant, several commentators credit that scene also to Middleton. It is said to be too slovenly and bombastic for Shakspeare.

It is unsafe to limit the critical treatment of Shakspeare's verse to metrical or verbal tests. Æsthetic emergencies will sometimes overrule the decisions of the sharpest critics who construct Shakspeare out of reputed peculiarities of his style. He escapes from them to be raggeder than we think is personal to him, broader

than our taste can tolerate, more thin or more fulsome than his grandest tone, whenever occasion summons traits which fit into a deeper consistency than that of style. Then, if the critic of metrical and verbal niceties is not also a human observer, or is too much preoccupied with his theory of the Shakspearean method, he will be apt to disparage some prescriptions of Nature.

It is also a very common procedure to illustrate the excellences of Shakspeare by comparing them with the inferior work of the contemporary dramatists. Either Shakspeare at his best ought to be matched with the other playwrights at their best, or else we ought to concede that his occasional weaknesses, which are like theirs, are not theirs, but his own. It is absurd to keep Shakspeare posturing incessantly in the finest attitude of the several periods of his style. During the Elizabethan age, England's soil stood thick with true poets whose fragrance often makes us suspect that Shakspeare is near. It is dangerous to be too positive upon the matter of sentiment as well as style. Take for an instance this :—

> "I am so light
> At any mischief, there's no villainy
> But is a tune methinks."

That lightness of heart is Middleton's. It is stray pollen from the garden of Shakspeare. But nothing is fructified : there is no tune in the villainous stuff which precedes and follows.

The wounded sergeant easily justifies his mangled metre and ragged pomposity of style. We should sus-

pect a more polished messenger of shamming faintness from loss of blood. He talks exactly as a common soldier should who is fresh from the great fight, puffed up with "valor's minion," and steadying himself upon reeking lines to deliver his message of victory. Middleton could not have so caught the color of the moment.

It is also supposed that Middleton wrote the scene, because when Ross enters he tells the King that

> "Norway himself, with terrible numbers,
> Assisted by that most disloyal traitor
> The thane of Cawdor, 'gan a dismal conflict."

A discrepancy is charged between this and the report of Angus, in Scene 3 (acknowledged to be Shakspeare's), who enters with Ross, and says, concerning the thane of Cawdor, —

> "Whether he was combin'd
> With those of Norway; or did line the rebel
> With hidden help and vantage; or that with both
> He labour'd in his country's wreck, I know not."

Perhaps Ross did not either. But he knew that Cawdor "assisted." He did not say that he was personally engaged in the fight.

The opening chant of the witches is denied to Shakspeare by one critic, because it seems to occupy the opening scene merely to inform us that they are to meet somewhere again; and by another it is attributed to Middleton because it does not flow in the usual trochaic manner of Shakspeare, and contains imperfect lines. Middleton may have Paddock and Graymalkin for his share in the attempt to spoil this grand chant, whose

accent ought to have sung Shakspeare's feeling into the critic's ear; for so the foot of Fate would fall in order to pitch the key of the tragedy, and lead its crime into our presence. Its measured step seems to issue out of some foreboding by Macbeth of his ambition's purpose. The weird sisters are not merely enjoying a thunder-storm, and wondering when they shall meet again in similar favorable weather. Their lips put a stress of destiny upon every syllable. The poet's pen unconsciously follows in their traces.

The same metre is employed in the "Tempest" and "Midsummer-Night's Dream," by Ariel, Oberon, and Puck, when they are on sublunary business. But they

"Foot it featly here and there:"

the lines skim or flutter, and do not tread. The accent is not so persistent: it does not sound like the hinge on which a pause swings open to admit the foot of a thing that is burdened with a solemn message. On the blasted heath of Macbeth, the verses of Ariel would be like a strayed butterfly: —

"Where the bee sucks, there suck I."

He spurs the omen out of owls and bats, and rides them away from the chill of the evening, "after summer, merrily." Prospero, hearing him sing, says, "That's my dainty Ariel." Puck likewise, too mercurial for chanting, carols with a broom on his shoulder to make a clean sweep of mischief: —

"And we fairies, that do run
By the triple Hecate's team,

From the presence of the sun,
Following darkness like a dream,
Now are frolic."

The lines go lilting like a little boat over the accent which can hardly raise a ripple. It is a supernature in the best of humor, beguiling or blessing men and women in a dulcet style.

But the witches chant holding torches of the lightning while the thunder slowly scans their verse: —

1 WITCH. When shall we three meet again,
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
2 WITCH. When the hurlyburly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.
3 WITCH. That will be ere set of sun."

It will be on the same day, then, to intercept Macbeth as homeward his ambitious mood hurries. The battle, which the rebels against Duncan's rule have just lost, Macbeth has won. What else has he won? His thoughts, out-travelling his body's utmost speed, will change into witches by the way and inform him. Hitherto his fateful Self has remained vague and disembodied. Now it will meet itself, and hear it utter a threefold "Hail!"

For thus I conceive that when Macbeth's crime had fully infected Shakspeare's imagination, and was urging it into the appalling swiftness of the first scenes of this tragedy, he endowed Macbeth with its own shaping quality. The witches were not decoys of another world to lure him into acquaintanceship with crime. They were his own intention grown to be so ravenous that it framed a prelude to his deed, as the condition of starving sets a

phantom banquet before a person's eyes. Shakspeare had no need of them to start the business of his play or to keep alive his plot. Macbeth and his wife did their own tempting so thoroughly that spirits might applaud and refrain from interfering. But these witches were characters of the second-sight which Shakspeare imputed to Macbeth, a distinguishing trait born into Macbeth's mind from the conception of this tragedy. The prosaic supernature of the old chronicle, on which the play is based, is transformed into a psychological peculiarity.

So we observe that these weird sisters were no posters of vulgar ill, horsed on nursery broomsticks, to deliver murrain in the fold and rheumatism at the hearth, in gratification of a vicious whim. But they became vulgarized into this whenever Macbeth was absent from the scene. Then they shrank from Fates to hags, such as Banquo's undistempered eyes saw them, withered, hairy-faced, laying chappy fingers upon skinny lips, — old women dreaded by the common people for reputed powers of bewitching. All such Celtic superstitions breed nobly in Macbeth's fancy: he knows all about the village gossip. The eldritch women are the nearest hint of supernature which he had; but his kingly anticipations tolerate no common pranks from them. When Macbeth is absent, Shakspeare shows what stale witcheries they traffic in. The critics blame the incongruity, or attribute it to some interpolating pen. But Shakspeare rightly intended to place in contrast with Macbeth's fantasy the popular material of his

age in which it worked. So we hear the witches relating their trumpery exploits. This one has been killing poor people's swine. Another threatens to water-log a shipmaster because his wife refused to give her chestnuts. They put their spiteful heads together, and gloat over a drowned pilot's thumb. When Macbeth enters, this ghastly twaddle is hushed by a domineering thought which meets in these crones his "all-hail hereafter."

In the scene which follows the banquet, Shakspeare brings the witches and their mistress Hecate together. The stage direction, "Enter Hecate to the other three witches," simply includes her as one witch more. She has a Greek name that was representative of the Moon in her baleful and haunting phase. But on this Northern heath she displays a genuine Celtic temper, and scolds the witches for having unbidden dealings with Macbeth; while she, "the close contriver of all harms," was never called to bear her part. Of course not, as Macbeth's imagination had no personal *rapport* with her; and all that Shakspeare wants of her is to keep the popular witch-element upon the stage, and set it to creating "artificial sprites" in collusion with the greater incantation in Macbeth's heart. The witches provide him nothing but the cave and the cauldron. The scene never rises into dignity until he arrives. Three old women, hovering around a kettle, throw in a number of nauseous curiosities which they have got by foraging in disreputable quarters: they stir the slab gruel to verses which are as realistic as a wooden spoon; yet neither Middleton nor any other of Shakspeare's contempora-

ries, save Marlowe perhaps, could have written them. But mark how the tone alters when Macbeth comes to conjure with them. What is it they do? "A deed without a name." Then there is only one more culinary interruption; but we shudder and cannot sneer, for it uses an ingredient furnished by a man who has committed crimes against nature: the spell catches the drippings of a murderer's gibbet. Macbeth's secret divinings of the future fill the scene: the visions incorporate his own anxiety. Out of his perturbed soul rise the armed head, the bloody child. He reassures himself with the phantom of a child crowned, with a tree in his hand, and misinterprets it into a "sweet bodement" of safety, so long as trees do not take to travelling. But the recollection of Banquo is the great disturber: that spirit sits at every feast of solace which the King partakes. His heart "throbs to know one thing:" Will Banquo's issue ever reign? The King's flaming soul throws shadows on the screen of his dread, — a show of kings, Banquo first and last, eight of them between Banquo blood-bolter'd and Banquo crowned. But the Banquo that smiles is bathed in blood. Blood let it be, then.

> "From this moment,
> The very firstlings of my heart shall be
> The firstlings of my hand."

But no critical theory can hold a work of imagination to a strict account. You may clap John Locke into the witness-box and riddle him with cross-questions: the same court has no authority to put a poet on oath to justify himself in every line; he is satisfied to let the

drift of his thought be traced through the material in which he works. Quartz that is found in certain localities is as good as gold, and rewards us for suspecting it. We need not strain Shakspeare's page into too minute an adaptation to our views in order to avoid rejecting it. If he convinces us that Macbeth and his wife have composed the tragedy before his pen touches the paper, the witches may appear just what we and Macbeth choose to have them, — at one moment concocters of country spells to give him a drench of murder, at another moment concocted themselves by a spell which his soul has brewed.

This spiritual gift is the main cause of all his practical hesitations. His strongest passion discharges and exhausts itself in a pulse of fantasy; as the electric fish lies awhile torpid after the transmission of a shock. In his case, there is imperfect connection of the motor nerves that run between imagining and doing; so that his milk of human kindness has time to mingle with his mood. When his wife has grown sick and incompetent to stimulate, dire necessity alone can do it for him; as we see after he has had the vision of Banquo's line of kings, when somebody informs him that Macduff, his most formidable enemy, has fled. This is his self-chiding: —

> "Time, thou anticipat'st my dread exploits:
> The flighty purpose never is o'ertook,
> Unless the deed go with it.
> But no more sights."

Macduff's "wife, children, servants, all that could be found," are slaughtered by him. It is a deed that, mak-

ing his fortunes more impaired than ever, betrays to us how feverish and impolitic his course becomes. Far better for him if he had not let the desperate crisis of his fate drive him out of the land of dreams. Shakspeare lets us hear Macbeth chiding the brag of his imagination when he says, "But no more sights." He has had enough of them, — too much time wasted in those presentiments which never have the element of prevention. On the contrary, it is a common experience that something is so sure to happen that it can impart to us a fruitless forefeeling of itself, as Henry IV. felt the blade of Ravaillac in his side a week before it struck him. Macbeth will humor no more sights. That is the key to Shakspeare's conception of the character. We are to understand that henceforth Macbeth is cured of his hallucinations.

Now let us return to the first scene provided with this pass-key. It unlocks that and all the subsequent supernature which had a relish for his society. We feel that the witches express the moral condition of Macbeth's mind, its tumultuous hesitation that is on the point of settling into the definiteness of crime, — "Fair is foul, and foul is fair." All moral discriminations are huddled together and dislocated by the upheaval of his subterranean motive.

He really sends these witches forth to a blasted heath, the avant-couriers of his own visit thither, and of a longing that gains substance and direction the more he entertains it. It is strong enough to be an object behind his retina; and it throws out shapes to limn them-

selves upon the air into which they make themselves and vanish. And they can appear only at that period of his evil brooding when it gathers and swells, too big for his brain, bursting its barriers to become external. After the actual murder of Duncan has occurred, the brain of Macbeth is depleted for a while: the ominous forms wait till Banquo's ghost can recruit them.

Macbeth has an imagination so keen and unbridled that it outruns the limits of thinking, to become projected outside of his bodily eye in shapes and objects that occupy the focus of his criminal intent. His crimes become ocular deceptions, because they are so palpably real to his mental vision, sharpened as it is by the ambitious sympathy of a wife whose temperament outraces action. Murder is Macbeth's owner before he is conscious that he has made himself the chattel of his wife's suggestions. That same creative fancy built forth into the air the handle of the instrument which he has fated himself to use: he marshalled it the way that he intended to go. No supernatural smith has forged the fatal weapon: it is tempered in the current of his own plastic mind.

But although Macbeth has this mobile imagination, like that which

> "If it would but apprehend some joy,
> It comprehends some bringer of that joy;"

and though he has become one of those madmen who

> "Have such seething brains,
> Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends,"

he is still capable of reverting to this cool reason, at least so far as to appreciate that his desperate dreams are the poetry of desperate consequences which will tax all his waking powers. When the apparitions vanish, in Act iv. 1, one of the witches gives a voice to Macbeth's perturbation; but why

> "Stands Macbeth thus amazedly?"

It was but the voice of revulsion from amazement, to "cheer up his sprites" and summon resolution.

When Macbeth originates any thing out of himself, that Self is not daunted, for it is too deeply compromised in fact and fancy. But when some phenomenon threatens him from a quarter that is outside the limit of his own creative power, as when Birnam Wood is descried coming toward Dunsinane, he is puzzled, and says: —

> "I pull in resolution; and begin
> To doubt th' equivocation of the fiend,
> That lies like truth.
> I 'gin to be a-weary of the sun."

Nothing has disturbed him till he appreciates that some agency which he does not control can transplant a forest at his castle gate. The apparition of the witches scarcely lifts his eyebrows. "Speak, if you can," is the calm greeting. When he starts, and seems to fear "things that do sound so fair," it is because the shapes he conjures become suddenly endowed with tongues, and he hears his own ambition syllabled. For a man is not proof against shrinking at the first moment that lends to the "airy nothing" of his desire a distinct name and purpose.

He is astonished at the audacious phrasing of his hopes, and he resents at first what seems definite enough to be an impeachment from something not himself; yet not until that moment was it really his Self. What phantoms have thus leaped out of vacuity into the midnight chambers of desire! What voices have drawn the startled answers of a crime that did not suspect this overlooking! But when the man's Self has undergone this real birth, and the secret parturition becomes a breathing child of consciousness, he soon accepts his own new self, and forgets that it was irritated into a cry by the first salutes of the atmosphere. Casting away all repugnance, Macbeth exclaims to his wicked wishes, before they have a chance to vanish, —

> "Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more!
> . . . Speak, I charge you!"

So the dagger that wavers in the heated air of his soul does not surprise him, — "Come, let me clutch thee!" Really, he expected to grasp it; for it was precisely the kind of instrument he thought of using, the very shape and workmanship thereof. There's nothing to perturb until he draws from his belt its counterpart, yet sees the other still solid in the air. That sets him to pondering: his

> "Eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,
> Or else worth all the rest."

But, in spite of that, the murder in his brain reddens, sprinkles the blade and dudgeon with drops of blood, "which was not so before." Now when the illusion

becomes the most intense, it is dispersed, as if the brain's own climax swelled to breaking. The collapse reminds him that the deed still waits to be accomplished: his dagger is yet clean. But its form is the bloody business which he has on hand to get through with before sweet morning. It seemed so clearly cut in his mind, and stayed so long before he could turn it out, that he thought it worth describing to his wife, as she indicates to us when at the banquet she calls his vision of Banquo

> "Proper stuff!
> This is the very painting of your fear;
> This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said,
> Led you to Duncan."

Now when the ghost of Banquo enters to occupy Macbeth's chair, the actor of the king's part need not strain himself to put on the highest degree of an appalled feeling. "Are you a man?" whispers his wife; and Macbeth gives the true tone to his share of the scene when he answers, —

> "Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
> Which might appal the devil."

He starts, to be sure; but he simply remarks, "The table's full." "Here is a place reserved, sir." "Where?" he exclaims, so little annihilated by the painting of his own consciousness. It has dazed him, as when a mirror shifts distant sunlight full into the eyes: they blink, and judgment cannot readjust the sight. So he dimly asks, "Which of you have done this?" He is not "distilled to jelly with the act of fear," but simply amazed at this

reproduction, so quick and palpable, of the deed just described to him by the hired murderer who, by doing that, put those "twenty trenched gashes" into his mind, whence they dripped over the chair of state. His talent for this spectral extemporizing has been indulged too often to overtake him with a special wonder. This unexpected Banquo may be dared, and even threatened: —

> "Thou canst not say I did it: never shake
> Thy gory locks at me."

His wife blames his "flaws and starts," at such a moment of festivity when ceremony ought to be the sauce to meat; but they are not the ague-fits of a man who is dropping to pieces at a dreadful sight. The image of his guilt absorbs and diverts his behavior from the guests in a way that suggests to them a sudden flightiness: —

> "Prythee, see there! behold! look! lo! how say you?
> Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too."

This is not bravado trying to steady itself in a breeze of horror.

In order to break Macbeth down, and fully identify him with the deed of which Banquo was the horrible shadow, his temperament required that the ghost should vanish and reappear at the moment when he recovers composure. Shakspeare has marked, by Macbeth's sudden change of demeanor, that he was usually familiar with these coinages of his brain. To whatever ecstasy his feeling rose, with or without his wife's complicity, Shakspeare would have us understand that Macbeth was

so fluent with these bodiless creations that he had naturalized the night-side of his mind. Therefore, Banquo must re-enter precisely when Macbeth drinks to the general joy, and to the dead man in particular. Shakspeare knew the moment when to spill Macbeth's wine and all his hardihood by putting out a disembodied hand to strike the goblet from his grasp. It was the very nick of time, but it was in the man's own temper.

Let us see how it was. The alteration of demeanor from astonishment to the abjectness of a guilty terror slips out of Macbeth's conviviality into the company, as he calls for wine and drinks "love and health to all." At the rim of his goblet he can even banter with his consciousness of murder: he is in a frame to enjoy proposing the health of

> "Our dear friend, Banquo, whom we miss;
> Would he were here!"

Now this pretence of desiring Banquo's presence uses up what resistance Macbeth has to spare. No sooner are the words out of his mouth than he imagines how they might be answered: the imagining it is the vivid answer. When you try jauntily to job off suspicion before other persons, the cheek grows pale with dread of being contradicted. A door is thrown ajar by this wind of pretending that nothing has been committed. Come on, there! the villain cries. Has any thing happened? Is anybody outside? Let him enter and take a look around! Sure enough, 'tis there: his mind's eye sees it enter. Even when the small faults of social life are denied or disclaimed by us, a ghost is raised upon

the face, a dubious semblance of your guilt in the evasive eye, or just a flicker in the corner of the mouth. Most people overestimate their strength to make a flat denial of misdeeds when their soul is reflected in the polished mirrors of watchful eyes. There is a non-committal look which collars a man, puts him in the dock, and sends him to jail before he knows that he has been apprehended.

Prosaic men with no imagination to defy can preserve a smug complacency after the commission of a crime, because they cannot vibrate to it. Give a stroke to their thick temper, and it only answers with a thud. Their face is an emotionless Sahara, over which no showery gusts or smiles of April linger. But Macbeth was delicately strung: the slightest stir of the invisible air was registered by a vibration. When the ghost slips out of his own phrase, 'twas too pat, — this coming at the toast, "to the general joy of the whole table," at this pretence of thirst to drink a dead man's welfare; too nicely timed for flesh and blood to bear; too suggestive of continual liability to see the eyes glaring across the brim of any moment. Observing how easily the awful figure can thicken out of invisibility, he cries, "Take any shape but that!" And his mind is desperate to exorcise it into an "unreal mockery," and vainly struggles with his own personifying power.

"It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood."

It is a cold, calculating vengeance, marrowless, bloodless, but alert in a shape against which Macbeth's nerves

at any time may stumble, on the midnight staircase, in the gallery's pale shimmer, in sleep between his wife and his embrace, and always at his own suggestion of a phrase, a dream. His fancy never yet inflicted such a frightful recoil of an offended Heaven. It comes at his own invitation; for he had said in the forenoon of that day, —

> "To-night we hold a solemn supper, sir,
> And I'll request your presence;"

to which Banquo acquiesced, —

> "Lay your highness'
> Command upon me."
> "Fail not our feast."
> "My lord, I will not."

On the way to it he was a little delayed by being murdered; but, though late, he does not fail.

This tragedy was slowly conceived during the married life of Macbeth and his Lady. Their ambitious desires spent years in collusion before an heir of opportunity was born to them. The rapid and breathless action of the earlier scenes makes clear to us that it does not flow from any sudden resolution. The past years topple in the wave that combs to break into this sweeping surge. The movement of the play is unnatural, unless we admit that the married couple have grown familiar with many projects, all of which make them languish for occasion. Macbeth has revelled in the idea that if the chance offered he possesses every other quality to supplant Duncan, — ambition, audacity, swiftness, all good fortune, except a turn of circumstance. He discovers at

the juncture that his wife is the only aptitude he can contribute to it. She remembers his profuse suggestions with a touch of scorn. Is he a man?

> "What beast was it, then,
> That made you break this enterprise to me?
> When you durst do it, then you were a man;
> . . . Nor time, nor place,
> Did then adhere, and yet you would make both;
> They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
> Does unmake you."

Strenuous in fantasy, "infirm of purpose." The sudden crisis betrays the secret pinings of past years for such an hour. The whispered conferences swell into a din: it shouts to tell us how their pillows touched, when darkness brooded in vain upon eyelids that were set wide open with a stare at a gleam of greatness far outside their chamber. We overhear, without ever having played eavesdropper, the anxious interchange of feeling beneath the garden aspens, which might catch their tremor from these two beings who passed hankering to and fro; he encouraging a reverie, she trying to chastise it into action with the valor of her tongue. Thus the years passed, while he alternated between the grand loyalty of many a fight and the treachery which grew warm upon the bosom of his wife. Much given to pondering and pleased with vivid day-dreams, he sought no way to realize them. Well as she knew this musing vein of his, and much as it displeased her spirit of action, she will have to be re-enforced by opportunity. Then the deed, now rusting in its sheath of speculation, may possibly leap forth. His mind did not have the

coupling which makes up wishing and doing into one train ; so the doing stands some distance off idle on the track. The track which emerged from Hamlet's resolution met so many diverging lines at the controlling switch that he was in doubt upon which to run : at length, impatient chance unlocked the switch, and set the rail for a disaster. When Macbeth's wishing became linked to acting, he was not over-nice about his route. The subtle Hamlet considered till he could not start. The inconsiderate Macbeth, when he ceased to vapor and began to move, blundered with a full head of fantasy into ruin.

When a man's brain is well charged with blood, his powers are unified ; but Macbeth's current was addicted to the lobes of figment to some defrauding of the rest. His wife's brain blushed all at once, and expanded to give the measure of her structure ; so that her hope, implicating the whole of her, had all the substantiality of a deed. She was already the deed from which Macbeth's ambition swerved. He spawned spectres : she gave birth to men-children only. A woman inspired through and through with love for him, discontented with the slowness of his fortune, longing to touch the top and finish of her own ; a helpmeet, whose unextinguished bridal ardor kept burning up all scruples as fast as her lover could rake them together. He, the still perfect object of her pride and passion, must become great : he must be lifted to a place whence all his qualities shall shine beyond cramped horizons with their petty crowds. She would kiss him into the compass of a

throne, if lips could waft her soldier so far. Her whole soul, imagining him in statelier guises, grows so impatient to speak out its action, that love itself becomes for a moment inarticulate, though it is all the time the life-blood of her hope; as when he returns to her after the perils of the campaign which overthrew rebellion, her embrace is grave, as if her arms enclosed the coming state: they do not radiate the touch of love. He is not her darling husband, but

> "Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!
> Greater than both by the all-hail hereafter!"

His letters transported her not only beyond the "ignorant present," but beyond him, away beyond the familiar circle of his arms, to which she had so often committed soul and body, — away so far that she does not feel him. "The future in the instant" is embracing her; and it is against that splendor that her heart-beats break.

The first exclamation which follows the reading of his letter betrays this passionate attachment: "*and shalt be* what thou art promis'd." There runs through the tone a vibration from her own desire, no doubt; but it is dominated by exulting love, and bursts into a chord. The time has come: he shall, he must be, what he has always longed to be. The weird sisters are in luck when they promised so fairly to a man who is so profoundly loved. 'Tis the good will of Nature that I love him.

Yet she knows him thoroughly. So close is her appraisement of him that she instinctively postpones love to the immediate exigency, — that is, to pour her spirits in his ear, to beat down every thing that might inter-

cept him when putting forth that one decisive hand-grasp toward the crown. She fears his nature, because scruples hamper his unscrupulous ambition. They are not entirely, as she conceives them, the results of inborn mildness. He has a politic disposition which grows all the more considerate as he sees the widening of his popularity. He will proceed no farther against Duncan, because

> "He hath honored me of late; and I have bought
> Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
> Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
> Not cast aside so soon."

He discusses the project of murdering Banquo in the same way: —

> "Though I could
> With bare-fac'd power sweep him from my sight,
> And bid my will avouch it, yet I must not,
> For certain friends that are both his and mine,
> Whose loves I may not drop, but wail his fall,
> Whom I myself struck down."

His wife must needs have sore dealings with such a non-committal spirit: —

> "Thou'd'st have, great Glamis,
> That which cries, 'Thus thou must do, if thou have it;
> And that which rather thou dost fear to do,
> Thou wishest should be undone.'"

He wants to win a game to which his hand does not entitle him; and the desire to win is as great as the dread of cheating.

This tainted mood of her beloved husband makes her almost frantic. Dreams satisfy her thirst as the mirage

quenches the craving of a caravan. Here comes my Macbeth and — "thou'rt mad to say it" — Duncan with him, — a lifetime's opportunity: 'twill never come again. Heaven drives Duncan "under my battlements," — yes, *mine*, for this night only; Macbeth's at every other time, but mine this once, to hold out with against my husband's mood. The raven himself is hoarse with chiding his delay. What need the tone of my language be, when the bird croaks Duncan's fatal entrance? Let it be unsexed. Here I tear every rag of woman's garments from it, in this my frenzy of dread lest Macbeth elude Fate's purpose: —

> "Come to my woman's breasts
> And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on Nature's mischief."

For love's sake her tongue becomes unlovely; and the delicate woman, with blue eyes sparkling like an electric firmament, and that little hand, snatched out of its old dalliance and clenched as if to drive a weapon, is transformed by the spirit of some ruthless Medea who has lent herself to contrive and enjoy another murder.

It has been said that Lady Macbeth did not reflect upon consequences as Macbeth did, because that is not the way of her sex. But the sex varies in this respect. The average woman is less selfish than we are, not from a feebler gift for calculation, but from a stronger capacity of love; for sex was invented before arithmetic. Macbeth reflected, not merely because he was male, but a selfish male, eager to be great, yet admiring to be

popular: he would drive the sharpest bargain with Destiny. His wife's impetuous movement of love oversets and spills out her calculation. Many a woman is capable of regarding all the consequences of an act, but she must not love too deeply: if she does, she will stick at nothing. If there be motive enough, she can turn a lover into a criminal, and then, with perjury, deceit, unblushing cheek, will screen him: they twain are one, for better, for worse. They are too deeply compromised to haggle about salvation. The very intercourse of sex devotes a woman: she has become flesh and blood of another. This complicity of nature engages the most imperious nerve-centres of her life. Were she aware of this beforehand, as she is not, it would not be evaded nor entitled bondage. If her lover has been always above her suspicion, the discovery on his part of some ill-doing is seldom violent enough to tear this bond: her revulsion is against a prying world that is no better than it should be; and she will help to secrete what she is too proud to have attributed to him. It is one article in the creed of a detective that a man's wife is more baffling than circumstance, more loyal than conscience. She is chaste clear through and single-hearted. Only when love itself is wounded and disgraced will she resign the culprit lover to the scorn of men; but not always even then, for it is her concern, and earth and heaven may keep out of it. But let him forge, she will secrete him, smuggle him out of the country, join him afterward to comfort him. Let him counterfeit any thing but love, and she will help to put the spurious

values on the town. Let him come home with murder on his cheek and blood upon his garments, she, fainting, will cleanse the stain that falls athwart her vision like a lurid sunset of her peace. Selfishness would turn informer, but perfect love casts out the fear of becoming that! Do you say this, too, is criminal? I say nothing, because it is my concern only to refer you to the facts. She is a partner, for better, for worse, — married and interpenetrated by the husband's fate. For love is charity: *it rejoiceth not in iniquity*, and yet it "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

Thackeray imagines the officers calling upon Mrs. Dodd, wife of that clerical scoundrel of the reign of George II.: "is my wife, Mrs. Dodd, to show them into the dining-room, and say, 'Pray step in, gentlemen! My husband has just come home from church. That bill with my Lord Chesterfield's acceptance, I am bound to own, was never written by his lordship; and the signature is in the doctor's handwriting'? I say, would any man of sense or honor or fine feeling praise his wife for telling the truth under such circumstances? Suppose she made a fine grimace and said, 'Most painful as my position is, most deeply as I feel for my William, yet truth must prevail; and I deeply lament to state that the beloved partner of my life *did* commit the flagitious act with which he is charged, and is at this present moment located in the two-pair back, up the chimney, whither it is my duty to lead you.' Why, even Dodd himself, who was one of the greatest hum-

bugs who ever lived, would not have had the face to say that he approved of his wife telling the truth in such a case. If ever I steal a teapot, and *my* women don't stand up for me, pass the article under their shawls, whisk down the street with it, outbluster the policeman, and utter any amount of fibs before Mr. Beak, those beings are not what I take them to be."

A bronze lioness was dedicated to Leæna, a girl of humble birth, beloved by Aristogiton, who, with Harmodius, conspired to kill the tyrant Hippias. She "was sentenced to the torture, and, that the pain might not wring from her any confession of the secrets of the conspiracy, she bit out her tongue." Some scoffer will say, What greater sacrifice *could* a woman make?

But she earned, and ought to have had, a verse in the poem of Kallistratus,* to wreathe around her name the myrtle-bough of the two patriots.

In "Far from the Madding Crowd," a novel written by Thomas Hardy, Bathsheba has hotly denied being in love; but she resents being taken in earnest by her confidant. "O God, what a lie it was! Heaven and my love forgive me! And don't you know that a woman who loves at all thinks nothing of perjury when it is balanced against her love?"

Lady Macbeth has the kind of wifehood which devotes itself. Hurried by her husband's hopes, she throws herself without reserve into the abyss they dig at her feet. All her character is lavished to consolidate his state.

* Ἐν μύοτου κλαδὶ τὸ ξίφος φορήσω, — In myrtle will I wear my blade.

She is not a vulgar murderess, because her soul is without a flaw of egotism. She is not a perfect woman; but she is most perfectly and irrevocably married. The imperfect wives are egotistical, from various motives. They have some knack or talent which craves airing, and earns the superficial admiration which is the discord of a household. Harlots are not the only women who live upon the street. Lady Macbeth's mind has no specialty, no gift that itches to be noticed, no facility save that of aggrandizing at any expense the man she loves and is absorbed in.

To be perfectly married, and perfectly bound up in a husband for weal or woe, does not imply loss of personality. Lady Macbeth is still immensely personal, even in the devotion of her love. For love alone *preserves* the person such as she intrinsically is. A feebler love, a more imperfect attachment, may favor idiosyncrasy, and permit the woman to assert some traits in isolation instead of letting them be merged in the total influence of her attachment. Greater love hath no man — and no woman — than this, that an individuality lays down its life to sustain a personality.

So when Macbeth tells her that he cannot proceed any farther in the business, for Duncan is in the castle, "in double trust," as king and guest, — and, besides, he does not like to risk the golden opinions he has lately won, — her language is an affront to the womanly sentiments which always charmed Macbeth and drew from him such phrases of fondness: all the horrors of this tragedy cannot frighten them from his lips. She is "my dearest

love," the "dear wife," and "dearest chuck." After the murderer has told him that Banquo is slain, he falls into musing which she strives to dispel: her words recall to him what a "sweet remembrancer" she is.

Therefore she hammers stern sentences out of the "undaunted mettle" of her love. They are iron levers to swing him out of the slough of his moods: disdainful smitings on the lover's cheek, they are, to bring them up to regal purple: —

> "Shame itself!
> Why do you make such faces?"
> "Fie! for shame!"

She could never be capable of risking this style if she had not been wont to soothe his ear with words selected by choice moments of inclination. She would fain recur to them, but there must be a coronation first. When the day comes, there will be bystanders and observers, else she would bend over him with the old-time prattle and remarry him as king.

But, "if we should fail," he suggests, revolving possibilities. What deliberate forethought of contempt her answer yields, if it be properly emphasized, — "*We* fail!" That is, I'll parrot your phrase, and say "*we*," but out of disdain. Of us two, the one who fails will not be myself. *We*, indeed! there's one too much of us for that. Only screw *your* courage to the point, and *we*, as you say, will not fail.

If this fortitude which pulls Macbeth through a murder leaves her in our imagination unsexed and brutalized, we deprive ourselves of reasons why he should have

loved and married her; for the clouds of moral disaster which whirl around him cannot conceal from us a fine and noble disposition. It breaks through the gathering obscurity in the delicate considerations which urge him to be a loyal host to Duncan; in the imagination so sensitive to life's fitful fever, so shaken nightly by terrible dreams, as she was too; so quick to mark the objects of Nature, and clothe them in poetic feeling; so melted by tender recollections, and capable of noble regrets that call a pause to ruin just as it breaks, a lull that lasts long enough for us to see how much will be ruined: —

> "My way of life
> Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf:
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
> Curses, not loud, but deep, mouth-honor, breath,
> Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not."

What sort of a woman was she, in whose behalf tenderness struggled with despair at last, when he was remembering what a soul had gone delirious, who was too nice for her own fortitude, eminent to be shattered, worse than sick, "as she is troubled with thick-coming fancies"!

"Cure her of that," he replies to the Doctor, but in a tone that repels rather than invites his skill; for those "thick-coming fancies" started from Duncan's room, where he lay looking like her father. Fatal first moment, beyond the reach of medicine! The Doctor has dark misgivings as to the cause of her sleeplessness, though he never heard that midnight cry, "Sleep no

more," which the parting soul of Duncan gave as it awoke and fled through the inhospitable palace. Macbeth murdered then the innocent sleep which might have been Nature's resource, but which no doctor can restore. Cure her of that? Cure me first of the infection that was caught at Duncan's bedside, and which spread to the partner of my night-horrors: we are both far gone beyond a doctor's art.

Still he pleads — "Canst thou not minister?" — in piteous forlornness against the better judgment which, when it recurs, prompts him to "throw physic to the dogs." It is a plea which seems to visit the chamber of the wife who ruined herself for love. It is the visit of a yearning that her heart might be cleansed in the oblivion of innocence.

> "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
> And with some sweet oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff,
> Which weighs upon the heart?"

If he had married a female butcher of the strongest-minded type, there would have been no fees to pay for doctor's attendance, and the bloom of regret would have been rubbed from Macbeth's language. Such a wife's muscle would have been perilous to any stuff that conscience might venture to suggest. A virago who could dash out the brains of her smiling babe as easily as nurse it, — more easily, forsooth, for how could Nature have endowed her person with the founts of maternity? — was not the kind of woman Shakspeare selected for the ruin of Macbeth.

If the poet had intended Lady Macbeth to be a fury, a person of abnormal wildness and cruelty, who had exhausted love and craved the fire-water of ambition, he would have prepared us to throw such a conception over her, by hinting some motive or circumstance for this divergence from the normal feminine nature. On the contrary, he purposely neglected the opportunity which the old story furnished toward the warping and poisoning of a woman's mind. The historical Lady Macbeth was the grand-daughter of Kenneth IV., who fell in the fight against Malcolm II., Duncan's father. Shakspeare has carefully suppressed any allusion which might recall the bitter family feud to unsex her and make revenge an element of her ambition.

Her shape, complexion, tone of voice, and style of feeling cannot be constructed for us out of the brawn of those lines which she throws out from the shoulder to hit Macbeth's irresolution. They do not provide us with the essence of her material. If we build a woman out of that literal clay, she would be square-shouldered, big-limbed, stout-bodied, sharp-boned, and pachydermatous, with a skin of bronzed leather tightened over knobs of cheek-bones, hairs woven in a wire-mill, and eyebrows like two heavy dashes from the circus charcoal. Prometheus would connive with Billingsgate to o'er-inform that clay. We confess that such a female lingers among the traditional properties of theatres ; but she is too shop-worn to dare again the blaze of footlights. We would not so defame a Jason, and blast his life by constructing the mother of his children out of

the language which the jealous, frenzied moment drove by heart-spasms from her lips. Still less can we subject Macbeth to the matrimonial luck of such a ferocious contrast. How truculently married would numerous husbands be if their wives' temper corresponded to the abandoned use of language which domestic virtue sometimes will employ, when every hair upon the head, both native and naturalized, seems twisted into the coils of a fell purpose to turn a thing of beauty into a fury for ever! The gust passes, the familiar features of the landscape reappear, and the lips transpire with mellower salutes; as when Lady Macbeth, who has been regretting that her husband should stay so much apart, greets him with the blandishing rhythm of those two lines: —

> "How now, my lord? why do you keep alone,
> Of sorriest fancies your companions making?"

There the old feeling strays out beyond the flaming swords which forbid paradise to follow in the track of this tragedy. The mutual crime closes a double gate, and posts inexorable sentinels against the endearments of the past.

BLONDE WOMEN.

LADY MACBETH.

BLONDE WOMEN.

THOSE colors of complexion and of hair which mark a feminine type that is distinct from the brunette announce also a different style of temper and action. Virtue and vice, in these two types of women, differ in quality and in mode of manifestation. If we construct too strict a theory upon this difference, it will savor of affectation: a great many exceptions might spring up to discredit it, and to threaten its advocate with being called fantastic. He would spend all his time in lame refutations, and lose the benefit of a moderate statement. We must be content to observe in general that there are distinctions of behavior between the blonde and the brunette, which are by no means cutaneous, but reside deep within the temperament. The superficial color and the physical structure announce what methods and gestures we may expect, but do not guarantee that our expectation shall be invariably fulfilled. Shares of goodness and of faultiness are impartially distributed to both kinds of women; but subtle differences of color and movement describe the transactions of their conscience and their passion.

The poets instinctively build fair-haired and fair-colored women around deeds which have the flavor of risk and daring; as Tennyson, who describes Godiva when she is disrobed to ride through Coventry that she

may strip a burdensome tax from her husband's subjects: —

> "She shook her head,
> And showered the rippled ringlets to her knee;
> Unclad herself in haste; adown the stair
> Stole on, and, like a creeping sunbeam, slid
> From pillar unto pillar."

So the brave and constant Imogen has eyes which are the "blue of heaven's own tinct;" and the flower that is like her face is the "pale primrose:" through her complexion the veins show like "the azur'd harebell."

Dante's forerunner, who is celebrated in Browning's "Sordello," is beloved by Palma, whose influence continually resists his poetic day-dreams. He, speculating too finely upon his relation to the politics of the epoch, and always wondering what way were best for him to take to benefit men, — through what party, Guelf or Ghibeline, he might approach his aspirations, — is obliged to turn for manhood and consistent purpose to Palma: —

> "Conspicuous in his world
> Of dreams sat Palma. How the tresses curled
> Into a sumptuous swell of gold, and wound
> About her like a glory! Even the ground
> Was bright as with spilt sunbeams."

Julia, in "Two Gentlemen of Verona," iv. 4, hangs jealously over the picture of Sylvia, her unconscious rival: —

> "And yet the painter flatter'd her a little,
> Unless I flatter with myself too much.
> Her hair is auburn, mine is perfect yellow:
> If that be all the difference in his love,
> I'll get me such a color'd periwig.
> Her eyes are gray as glass; and so are mine:
> Ay, but her forehead's low, and mine's as high."

All the light-complexioned women may be classed as blondes, whether the pure red and white that strive for ascendency be pacified by golden hair, or whether a more even tint of the cheek find its correspondence in hair of chestnut hue. There are also women of high vitality, with gifts never too forthputting because blended into a harmonious disposition, who contribute still a fresh tone to this chromatic scale; for their heads wear the crisp aureole of another shade that seems to invite you, as William Blake, the painter, invited his city friend, to a "thatched roof of rusted gold." Beneath these roofs we can take shelter, fearing no catastrophe, unless the rich and winning manners bring one on. In Bellini's portrait of Cassandra Fedeli,* the famous improvisatrice, whom the Venetians crowned early in the sixteenth century, this gracious style of woman is preserved.

There is a kind of brunette whose eyes are black as the sloe-berry, with the pupil and the iris melted together: they are couched underneath sombre hedges of eyebrows, and silently keep a good look-out. "The Prince of Darkness is a gentleman:" so can the princesses of the same color be ladies, but their style may ambush wickedness enough to task the most adventurous resources of a criminal lawyer. You will notice, however, that their scheming minds are endowed with little sprightliness. Intrigue does not put forth a sparkling surface that is swept by the light thrills of various

* Brought from Italy by Mr. Jarves, and now in the possession of J. W. Bigelow, Esq., New York.

moods that blow: the social prattle lacks the tone of charming simplicity and ease. The face is subject to lowering weather when one of these women meditates a poisoning: there is one clinch of the teeth as the limbs collect to make a fatal spring, one glance askant at the person whom she is diplomatically entertaining with arrangements for his ruin. They cannot so readily nurse a fell purpose with a melting air of maternity which transpires in every line of the face and limbs, as the victim is held cosingly to the fatal breast. He is clutched a little too menacingly, and has time for a suspicion concerning the nutriment he is about to draw.

But when blonde women have a talent for mischief, they delicately distinguish themselves from the brunettes in the style of it. For downright, unadulterated mischief, let us be commended to the blonde women of the Indo-Germanic races. And frequently it is merely organic, with no more premeditation or sense of consciousness than a stinging-nettle has. They know how to be unaffectedly unscrupulous, as Miss Rosamond Vincy was in "Middlemarch," with a gay versatility that is rare in women of a differently-tempered color. Your *riant* blonde can drop a bolt from a clear sky, and scatter your long-projected picnic with sudden misery. As you look up, it is hardly credible: how or when did the weather change? You almost doubt the evidence of sense. Darnley must have been blown up by accident. There will always be two parties relative to any transaction which implicates a blonde woman, because her resources of demeanor are so ample, she can recur

to them so nimbly, she can meet gathering suspicions with such angelic refutation in her smile, and the sluice-gates of emotion are so nicely hung that a touch of taper fingers can let into the scene a freshet of disclaimer that sweeps your rubbishy doubts away. Not a smut escapes from the internal simmering to settle upon the snow-white guarantee of appearance. She reminds us of that adaptation to machines which exercise a driving-power, by which they are enabled to consume their own smoke and cinders. Her transparency of skin, and the freshness of color that spreads up to the temple's whiteness like an after-glow upon the glacier, lend the proper blush to all her actions. She enjoys the constant advantage of a face that has the traditional tint of innocency: when delicate culture and mobile gifts are behind, sportive moods come out to make a charming din that just drowns the blab of mischief.

If the poets have assigned good and noble actions to the blonde women of the imagination, the same function working in legendary lore has attributed from the most ancient times, and with striking persistency, mankind's woes to golden beauties. "Lilith, the first wife of Adam, was a cold, passionless, splendid woman, with wondrous golden hair. She was created Adam's equal in every respect, therefore properly enough refused to obey him. For this she was driven from the Garden of Eden; and Eve was made to order out of one of Adam's ribs. Then the Golden-haired Lilith, jealous, enraged, pining for her lost home in Paradise, took the form of a

serpent, crept into the garden, and tempted Adam and Eve to their destruction. And from that day to this, Lilith, the cold, passionless beauty with golden hair, has roamed up and down the earth, snaring the sons of Adam and destroying them. You may always know her dead victims; for, whenever a man has been destroyed by the hands of Lilith, you will always find a single golden hair wrapped tight around his lifeless heart." *

A late poet unwinds into verse the fatal hair around his heart: —

"Seeing thy face, with all thy fluctuant hair
Falling in dull gold opulence from thy brow,
Watching thy light blue eyes, now fired, or now
Laughterful, or now dim as with despair,
I wonder, friend, that it should be God's care
To have made at all (what matter when or how?)
A being so sadly, desolately rare,
So beautifully incomplete as thou!

"O rank, black pool, with one star's imaged form!
O deep, rich-hearted rose, with rot at core!
O summer heaven, half-purpled with stern storm!
O lily, with one white leaf dipt in gore!
O angel shape, whom over curves and clings
The awful imminence of a devil's wings!"

Greek genius understood of course that when Pandora was endowed with gifts, Aphrodite took a double handful of the golden foam off Cyprus, whence her own blondness rose, and gilded Pandora's clay. What a pity that the mischievous Hermes put a thieving flattery into that gracious form! It ran into the fingers with an

* Report of M. D. Conway's striking lecture upon the History of the Devil.

instinct to baffle man's profoundest forethought. In one of her Greek aspects she was called *Ἀνησίδωρος*, bestower of presents, like those of Ceres, colored like the golden-bearded rye and corn.

Lydgate married Miss Rosamond, that piece of unexceptionable blondness, whose temper during matrimonial crises was so cool and even as to amount to the highest provocation. A perfectly well-regulated bit of Nature's chasteness was this wife, who went about the town prevaricating and misrepresenting when her husband's affairs had become involved, telling fresh fibs to cover the flanks of her first ones; thus building a track that shunted him off into ever new embarrassments. Infantile bloominess of flesh and even-tempered eyes were nothing but the skim of tortuous pride; and a lie dropped from her lips the prettiest product in the world.

Shakspeare fancied that Caliban's mother, Sycorax, was a "blue-eyed hag." Bianca Capello, a woman of solid and whole-souled powers of mischief, was the "golden-haired" sorceress of Venice.

The women of the Huzules, a Sclavonic tribe that has settled in the Carpathian range, are vastly superior to the men. The blonde type predominates. They ride horses astride, and in morals are perfect Messalinas, filling the villages with intrigues which frequently have most tragic terminations.

So was Helen Jegado a pure blonde. She lived in the time of Louis Philippe; and a great many persons fell victims to her genius for murder. No less than

twenty-five are positively known to have been taken off by her. She managed wonderfully to use two innocent women to cover these crimes and to be suspected instead of herself. At the place of execution she exonerated them.

Charlotte Corday's hair "seemed black when fastened in a large mass around her head: it seemed gold-colored at the points of the tresses, like the ear of corn, — deeper and more lustrous than the wheat-stalk in the sunlight." Her variable eyes were "blue when she reflected, almost black when called into animated play." Her skin had the wholesome and marbled whiteness of perfect health.

Rebecca Sharp had "a knack of adopting a demure *ingénue* air, under which she was most dangerous. She said the wickedest things with the most simple, unaffected air when in this mood, and would take care artlessly to apologize for her blunders, so that all the world should know that she had made them."

Ninon de l'Enclos, and Madame de Chevreuse, the famous conspirator who baffled two cardinals with an admirable mixture of pluck and cunning, were pure blondes. Such women court their objects and pursue their schemes in a manifold and sprightly fashion: their magnetic power flits to and fro, many-colored, subtle, silent, swift as an aurora. They have complicated the policy of courts and sown dissension in cabinets. They misrepresent a statesman's secrets, set one clique against another, stir about in society till it becomes one stupendous snarl; and perhaps you cannot point to a spot

upon their reputation. They give slander itself no opportunity to lie as they can do, while they immaculately defy truth to brand as counterfeit the phrases of their charming insincerity. Look at the smooth brow that sheds your scrutiny: there's not a crease nor wrinkle on it where suspicion may lodge to fester. The eyes embrace you with the frankness of Joab, who took Abner aside to speak with him, quietly, asking, "Art thou in health, my brother?" and smote him there under the fifth rib, and left him far from well.

Among blonde women we can easily observe two kinds, which may be called, for brevity, the lunar and the solar. The one kind seems as if blanched by sunlight that has been reflected: it wilts from defect rather than excess of warming power. The passions are low-toned, like the body: a sort of scrofulous habit seems indicated by a too delicate and thin complexion; it lurks in the lifeless yellow or chestnut of the hair, in the unsound teeth and the languid speech. There is little valor for mischief in them, as there is little ambition for achievement. Their virtue seems only a temper that is kept faint as if by constant exudation of the blood.

But the Mary Stuart of history and the Lady Macbeth of Shakspeare belong to a different type. We know that the former had a delicate exterior, auburn hair, and beaming blue eyes: her tone of speaking was gentle and sweet, excellently soft and low. Mrs. Siddons, whose style and color were altogether different, became so saturated with Lady Macbeth as to be convinced she must have been a blonde. We think that

Shakspeare implies and justifies this delicate perception, and turns it into history. Both the queens of Scotland represented the kind of blonde women who are fired by sunlight: it crisps the golden or the chestnut hair, becomes quicksilver in the veins, hits every brain-cell with its actinic ray, and chases over the yielding hair in ripples like a blown wheat-field. The voice is low, but ever clear and even, — a fabric closely woven throughout, capable of sustaining the strongest moments of the soul, and of vibrating with them: the whole gamut of passion may be swept by it, from the enticing whisper to the peal of defiance. It is a trumpet, made of silver, and not one note of it is brassy; but it pierces the distance none the less directly, and summons Macbeth by sonorous phrases out of the mist and pointlessness of dreams.

But Nature drew the character of Mary Stuart from elements less simple than were used by Shakspeare in constructing Lady Macbeth. Mary, to all the culture of her times, added various tastes and a delicate susceptibility for art: she loved music, plays, minstrels, games, and was passionately devoted to the chase. Her great pace in hunting, her fiery dash through the underbrush, was observed and has been long remembered. Once, having been thrown from her horse, the attendants found her on the ground, gayly laughing as she put up the dishevelled hair.

In the cold autumn of 1562, she went in person upon an expedition to punish a Highland clan. She jested with fatigues and hardships, "and was as much at her

ease," says Froude, "galloping a half-broken stallion over the heather as when languishing in her boudoir over a love-sonnet." She said "she wished she was a man, to know what life it was to lie all night in the field, or to walk on the causey with a Glasgow buckler and a broadsword."

She reminds us of Bathsheba in the novel which has been already quoted. Talking with her maid Liddy, she said, "I hope I am not a bold sort of maid, — mannish?" she continued, with some anxiety. To which Liddy replied, "Oh, no, not mannish; but so almighty womanish that 'tis getting on that way sometimes."

At the age of nineteen, the delicately nurtured woman set sail from France for Scotland, to begin that long, indomitable struggle to succeed Elizabeth, and to break the Reformation in England. The wiliest and most inflexible of Queen Elizabeth's counsellors shivered their weapons against the guard of her swift tact, until imprisonment, which was twice escaped from, and death, —

"That fell arrest,
Without all bail," —

became England's last resource against this dangerous, lovable, bewildering, fateful woman. Her bronze effigy in St. Mary's Church at Warwick lifts features whose clearly cut delicacy implies her resolution, and the magnetic power of all her loves and plots.

Her attachments were sometimes inspired by politics, sometimes by sentiment. All her mental and emotional ability was pledged to honor drafts which came in the interest of the Pope, of France, of hatred of Protestant-

ism, of desire to govern England. She was in a frame of constant pique at the influence and reputation of Elizabeth. The Scottish reformers kept her skirmishing talent well employed. Defending her amusements or her mass against John Knox, she braved him till his bitter speech gathered into brine in her eyes. But, as it flowed, the lines of resolution upon her face were etched more clearly. She could lend her person to Bothwell with the hope of consolidating a party. With power and beauty at command, she lavished every wile to control the transitional epoch into which she was born. Her life was a series of shifts and dramatic surprises. But no dark recollections ever disturbed her sleep; nor did she carry a candle through the midnight of a shattered mind, to throw light upon suspected murders.

In love she was less constant than Macbeth's wife, who felt but one great passion, and had no art nor culture to lavish in retaining its object. She might have said, —

> "I am as true as truth's simplicity,
> And simpler than the infancy of truth."

We shall find this sun-lighted heart less capable of endurance than the other blondes of history.

LADY MACBETH.

To make and share a husband's fortune was her only motive, and the only driving-power she could supply to that was love: her character was most inartificially con-

trived out of one or two broad elements of womankind; a Semele to invite the solar ray that consumed her. To be a woman was her sole resource.

Let us notice, therefore, how prompt was her first inspiration, and how quickly it recoiled exhausted from its terrible victory.

A full-blooded virago who has murder in her heart, but supposes that any chance to commit it is a long way off, would not betray emotion if Fate suddenly tossed a chance into her lap. Lady Macbeth's nerves are not well padded against such a shock. The husband's letter astonishes and exalts her soul; but the old desires, never before so animated, seem fruitless as ever, since neither time nor place concur. In the height of this turmoil, an attendant enters to say, "The King comes here to-night." The tidings appal her: has Providence gone mad, to trust Duncan with her in this temper? The man is mad to say it. Coming! To-night! "And when goes hence?" Her looks and speech recoil from the coincidence. Then she breaks into that soliloquy which is not the ranting of a mannish murderess who is in a frenzy to get at her victim. The lines quiver with the excitement of a delicate nature that is overstrained and dreads to fail. Vexed and chagrined at womanly proclivities which will be apt to follow their bent against her purpose, she invokes spirits to unsex her, to make thick the blood that runs too limpidly and warm, and clot "the access and passage to remorse." It fills us with dismay to see how far a susceptible womanhood can be transported by a vehement passion;

as when, toward nightfall, the dweller upon a soft inland stream sees the freshet's discolored water come down, thick with the fruits of gentle husbandry and the quenched hearths of homesteads, with piteous wrecks of innocence clinging round them.

Soon after those shrill cries, as of a string too tightly drawn, have escaped from her, the King arrives at the castle. Contrast the dry color of her language when, as hostess, she welcomes him: we are surprised at its constrained and measured politeness. Her soul seems to have collapsed into the dullest prose: —

> "Your servants ever
> Have theirs, themselves, and what is theirs, in compt,
> To make their audit at your highness' pleasure,
> Still to return your own."

It is the talk of a book-keeper to his employer. Has something bereft the fine woman of her tact? No, the fineness of the woman fell instinctively into a protective tone. Her consciousness has been so acutely set to the key of crime that she knows the least touch will sound it. The secret is torture to the mind, but must be borne; as a guilty man, who overhears the pursuit drawing close to his cramped and insupportable place of concealment, turns rigid with stifled groans. So, when Duncan says, —

> "See, see! our honor'd hostess!
> The love that follows us sometime is our trouble,
> Which still we thank as love."
> "Fair and noble hostess,
> We are your guest to-night," —

the courtesy, so mild and royal, is a threat that comes

too near the pent-up feeling: she grows preternaturally still and cold.

The Amazonian female would have failed in tact through absence of anxiety, as her language effervesced with the congenial occasion. Such a largess of blank verse would be scattered as certainly to raise suspicion in the observant Banquo, who has heard the witches' promise. The awkward parsimony of Lady Macbeth's words might be credited to the suddenness of the visit, to a stately dread of seeming over-pleased at the "late dignities" and over-covetous of more, or to the constraint of feeling unprepared to entertain so many people.

But the other style of woman, as the victim approached, would cram him with fulsomeness to make him fat for slaying, somewhat in this fashion:—

> Most gracious highness! the poor wife am I
> Of thy good soldier, now the Thane of Cawdor,
> But ever less the more thou raisest him.
> He should be here: he'd say the castle's thine,
> And wring its service to some decent welcome.
> Alas, I can but kneel, and droop my lips,
> And let them flutter ere they light upon
> My perch, thy hand; this violence to plot,
> Scarce this, against thy person venturing here;
> But see, my knees invoke great Heaven's rest
> Upon thy stay and slumber; all good angels
> Hie hither to encamp around his bed.
> Enter, my lord; treason has bled to death,
> And roofs are sacreder than oaths.

The impetuous language and action which hurry along the following scenes, and sweep reflection from every holding-ground, are not the result of an excision

of psychological leading-matter by Middleton, or any one else who worked for the theatre and reduced the length of the play to bring it into acting limits. A miner strikes his pick through a thin partition behind which subterranean waters have been slowly gathering: they deluge his tunnel and sweep him away. In Shakspeare's mind the hidden precedent of the tragedy's action accumulated. The first scratch of his pen let it loose to flood the scenes. There was no preliminary warning. The psychological filtration through his brain from the sources of his plot bursted in like a freshet that explains itself without recalling separate rills.

Nor was the swift and unheralded action inspired solely by Lady Macbeth's impatience to be the wife of a king. All women run after their thoughts more eagerly than do the men. They are Atalantas without a weakness for the golden apples which are sent across the path to break up their desire for winning. But, if Atalanta secretly prefers a suitor, she will chase his golden apple. For whenever personal preferences divert a woman from her course, it is because they, too, grow in the Hesperides of her imagination. Men deliberate, study the ground, observe the obstacles, cluster round preponderating judgment and wait for its direction. Women are not heedless: they also can deliberate until the heart has become too deeply involved; but, when the heart is set upon something, they are the swift-footed couriers of the Ideal, and their only turnpike is as the bird flies. If there be any virtuous advantage to be gained, any scheme to carry out, any

enthusiasm that beautifies the distance, they go across-lots for it, not minding that they may stumble upon brooks unprovided with a stepping-stone or fallen tree. They fret at obstacles, and instigate the neighborhood against them. They advocate with ardor, consult no selfishness, want to override every thing with the moral feeling that what is worth doing at all ought to be done quickly. Macbeth seizes this trait by his reflection that it would be all very fine if it were done when 'tis done: her quickness would then justify itself to his consideration. For good or evil all women who can be inspired with purposes speak in her ideal tone: —

> "Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valor
> As thou art in desire? Would'st thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thine own esteem;
> Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
> Like the poor cat i' the adage?"

Women can shame a partner into valor by venturing the worst affront when they cry, —

> "From this time,
> Such I account thy love;"

that is, I account it like thy drunken hope which wakes up penitent and pale. When a husband hears himself scorned in this style, he does not believe his own ears, but instinctively translates the phrases to mean, "From this time, count upon my love." For the ideal, in the moment of its greatest rage and dread, betrays the immortal attachment which is a man's breath, his superiority, his sole success.

She does not give Macbeth time to observe that to murder Duncan will exact of him the murder of Malcolm also, who is designated by the King to succeed him. She is in no temper to reflect that the taking-off of Duncan will plunge the husband into ever-renewing complications: her transport carries him away to fruitless crime. But the first blow spends her terrible ardor and disenchants her of murder. She can force it upon her husband, but is not endowed with the complexly woven tissue of talents and motives that can sustain reaction. His muscle drags him through successive scenes of feigning, inures him to the contemplation of fresh murders, and keeps his foot well planted to thrust and parry the foes of his own making. She is all made for love, and for the uttermost that love can suggest: there is no masculine fibre in her heart; it is packed with the invisible, fine-strung nerves of a feminine disposition. And they have been stretched to such a tension that, since no solider flesh sheathes and protects them as they relax, we see them ravelled: they no longer sustain the firm heart-beat and regulate the blood. There are symptoms, even before the murder is committed, that her strength threatens to be inadequate. She must have recourse to wine, to borrow courage from it that may last till morning; and her mood is so intense that the light body can absorb large draughts of it:—

"That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold."

It does not, however, cancel a susceptibility, which

was unusual with her, to the weird influences of night and loneliness. It was unusual; for I think it to be no fancy, but a well-attested experience, that the blonde women are the least affected by the physical influences of darkness: they have a certain clarity to repel this infection that penetrates so many darker-looking people, — a certain nonchalance that is manifested even in girlhood's nursery, and prevents spooks from being rocked in the same cradle. Being free from the frailness which is latent in a tendency to project startled feelings into ghostly phenomena, they do, as a general rule, find it easy to translate the queer noises and conspiracies of the darkness into their plain prose. They keep the obscurest entry free from the litter which gathers from tales of superstition: from garret to cellar there's not a nook where creepiness can make a goblin-nest. Up and down lonesome staircases they can go without a light, prowl unperturbed into the uncanniest corners, hurry to investigate the cause of a low moan with a warm heart for a candle, enter the room of the dead without laying a reluctant hand upon the lock or pausing to summon fortitude.

One of these women was Lady Macbeth, who never before experienced, what her husband always had in liability, those paintings of his fear, those flaws and starts, that objectivity of over-wrought imagination. But now this scene, which treads upon the threshold of the murder, shudders with the proximity of something bodiless; on the corridors and stairs a spectral gleam is congealing into shapes not known to this world; the wild

weather of the "sore night" has hunted the moon and stars out of the heaven; the rain rushes at the panes to get vindictive entrance; the wind utters personal threats at these violators of "the Lord's anointed temple;" —

> "The obscure bird
> Clamor'd the livelong night."

How finely seated in its place is that word "obscure"! Substitute for it the various reading, "obscene," and you destroy the sense which Shakspeare would convey of a creature heard but seldom seen at any time, sitting so moveless in the dark: not a leaf prates of its whereabout; the mysterious hooting seems to be one of the unexplained things of Nature.

Lady Macbeth's breath itself is intent to listen, — "Hark!" Then, as her novel tremor passes off, she interprets it: —

> "It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman,
> Which gives the stern'st good-night."

Far away, through innocent hamlets, human watchmen go their rounds, and let their "All's well!" mix with the dreams of inviolate chambers. Here is a different bellman to invite an eternal hour to murder sleep. She listens again, and her nerves are tightened by the hand of silence. "He is about it." How awfully does Macbeth's voice come struggling back into this stillness, where the wife begins to feel something personal in the air! So does he. "Who's there? What, ho!" And she expects to see something that was not invited: —

"Alack! I am afraid they have awak'd,
And 'tis not done: the attempt, and not the deed,
Confounds us."

Shakspeare makes us aware that Macbeth, after killing Duncan, must pass along a passage and descend some stairs to the next story. What a walk of a few moments, protracted into endless awe, with Duncan disembodied close at his heels! The brave soldier's feet weaken at the distance which his own soul creates. Will he ever annihilate a space that is made by a crime and reach his wife again?

"I have done the deed! Did'st thou not hear a noise?"

They listen, looking sidelong at each other:—

"I heard the owl scream, and the crickets cry.
Did not you speak?
When?
Now.
As I descended?
Ay.
Hark! Who lies i' the second chamber?"

The scene is full of pauses of startled listening: it waits with a husband absent upstairs upon an errand, retreats with him through a haunted corridor, thenceforth for ever haunted, and shudders in us as midnight never shuddered before; and the crickets, those carollers of a sacred hearth, cry, as blood drips through it and quenches their content.

When Macbeth relates to her his sensations while he was upstairs, the amen that stuck in his throat, the voice that threatened him with nights devoid of sleep

and that still cried, "Macbeth shall sleep no more," Lady Macbeth, intuitively feeling that she could dare no more, and could not risk another thought with her imagination, said, —

> "These deeds must not be thought
> After these ways: so, it will make us mad."

The deed is done, but to her surprise it will not do for her too curiously to consider it. But no, the deed is not yet neatly finished. Macbeth, in his hurry to elude the dead man, has brought the bloody daggers with him. She must carry them back for him: not for his newly bought kingdom would he return along that entry and through that ghastly door. The exigency recalls the fair woman to her native temper. To put the needed finish to her night's business, she resumes her wonted contempt for darkness and the sight of the dead: —

> "The sleeping and the dead
> Are but as pictures."

While she is absent, there comes that knocking at the gate which appals Macbeth; and we quake with him in that moment which lets into the tragedy a human world again.

This world, unconscious of the hell which husband and wife have inaugurated within the castle, has been travelling all night to reach it. What morning redness salutes Lenox's and Macduff's eyes!

> "Ring the alarum-bell!
> Malcolm! awake!
> Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit,
> And look on death itself! Up, up, and see

> The great doom's image! Malcolm! Banquo!
> As from your graves rise up, and walk like sprites,
> To countenance this horror. Ring the bell!"

Thereupon Lady Macbeth enters: she has had time to see what color Duncan's blood imparts to water, in the little act of washing the hands which became memorable to her, and seared into the brain as if with a brand heated in nether fires. No constraint of alarm caused her to enter, but she is driven in by the terrible affinity of her feeling: she belongs to the scene, — a part of it which cannot be left out. She must hear what is said, observe what occurs, keep her appointment with the death which she solicited. This fascination of spilt blood, this woman's instinct to see her husband through the first surprise, this dread of some defect in his behavior, this solicitude to repair it by some spirit of her own, takes her into a scene which deals one stroke too much upon her emotion. For the morn broke rapidly, as if to resent the criminal advantage which the midnight took. She has had no chance to calculate what effect this murder will have upon human sensibilities when they are taken by it unawares. She sees the awfulness of it suddenly reflected from the faces and gestures of Macduff, Banquo, and the rest. It beats at the gate, across which she has braced a woman's arm, and breaks it in; and a mob of reproaches rush over her. What have those delicate hands been doing? What is this hideous issue of her slender body, just born, stark naked, in the horror of these men? Nature, in making her, was so little in the male mood, so intently following

the woman's model, that it left out the element which carries Macbeth through this scene. To hear her husband describe his simulated rage in butchering the grooms, and draw that painting of Duncan in his blood, —

> "And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature
> For ruin's wasteful entrance," —

it is too much, and 'tis plain she is not needed. "Help me hence, ho!" her sex cries. It is the revulsion of nature in a feminine soul. Love has exhaled all its hardihood into the deed which is just now discovered. She, too, has only now really discovered it. The nerves part at the overstrain of seeing what the deed is like, and drop her helpless into a swoon.

She recovers, but her mind wakes to the necessity of playing a part, to the harassing assumption of royal demeanor to hide a slavish dread, to the cruel demands of courtesy, to the effort to sustain her husband's state, to the counterfeit composure of the banquet: —

> "Better be with the dead,
> Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to peace,
> Than on the torture of the mind to lie
> In restless ecstasy."

She does not say this; but Macbeth avows it for her, since they are partners

> "In the affliction of these terrible dreams
> That shake us nightly."

Banquo would have been safe enough from her; for the scheming love has been too rudely handled. But he is not safe from Macbeth, who does not reflect that,

while Malcolm is out of his reach, 'tis a superfluity of naughtiness to slay Banquo and Fleance. His wife might have counselled better, but he did not dare to confide his temper of murder to her. Henceforth, murder is become a necessary of their daily life. But her feeling that nought is had and all is spent does not involve a threat of Banquo's person. She broods in spiritless reaction, and tells Macbeth that "what's done is done." He broods in dangerous recklessness, feeling that it is not yet done: —

> "Thou know'st that Banquo and his Fleance live."

She does not perceive what he is darkly hinting, and merely replies that they cannot live for ever. He judges hastily that they must die at once; and "there's comfort yet." But he does not venture to be explicit with her, because, if she cannot detect the murder in his words, —

> "There shall be done
> A deed of dreadful note," —

it is because there is murder no longer in her heart. He does not dare to risk his resolutions openly with her returning womanhood. So, when she unconsciously asks, "What's to be done?" he cannot muster courage to expose his thought: —

> "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
> Till thou applaud the deed."

Then his imagination, excited by the dire policy which he premeditates, shudders into language that recalls to us her own when she unsexed herself to make a man of

him: it is his turn to be demonized, and she simply marvels at his words.

So she goes to the feast where Banquo is expected, without his ghost in her heart: not a hint reaches her of what has happened. It is plain that she misconstrues the distracted behavior of Macbeth; and when he says, "If I stand here, I saw him," she could only suppose that it was the ghost of Duncan which was the painting of his fear: so that she bravely carries Macbeth through the brunt of the guests' wonder, and passes to that night's tormented sleep without a fresh spectre in its train. For Macbeth was either too dispirited or too considerate to tell her; so he lets the news wait till another day divulges it.

When the guests have departed, Macbeth is still absorbed by the terrifying possibilities of disclosure that were suggested by the apparition. Banquo, who can so easily become visible, may hint the manner of his death to somebody, to any thing, making the dumbest object voluble with it, — may even make a stone move to hit the murderer, or a tree's branch point speakingly to him, "the secretest man of blood." But his wife says nothing either to refute the fear or to make him ashamed of it. What palsy has been laid upon that ruffling tongue? It is not silent, as some critics fancy, because her love sets in to pity and to spare him; nor silent because the exigency has passed away, nor because Middleton struck out some speech of hers, — but silent simply from exhaustion. See, between the lines of Macbeth's mood, how the overtaxed woman droops,

utterly frayed away, although the guests relieve her by departure. Exhaustion so preoccupies her that love itself is too faint to pity or to cheer, and her only thought is to get to bed. She has begun to feel the drift of a hopeless future, against which she has no strength, by contending, to regain the old mooring-ground where they cut loose and allowed an unseen current to clutch the slim bark. Neither curiosity nor self-interest can rouse her when Macbeth mentions that he has strange things in head which he means to carry to performance.

"You lack the season of all natures, sleep,"

is all that her tired nature has left to say.

Her fortitude just eked her out to reach the gracious action that dismissed the guests, as she wished "A kind good-night to all!" Yes, good-night to all, — to us also. She gains the shelter of her chamber: then she entirely disappears from the action of the tragedy, to sicken in seclusion with the consciousness that her fatal love has purveyed successive murders for her household. She can be of no further use to Shakspeare now: such a terrible requisition of genius has exhausted her; she is removed from our view and consigned to the offices of women. For the courage that was screwed to the sticking-place was screwed by love's wrest one turn too far. But another kind of woman — massive, cruel, prompted by unmixed ambition, guided by pure hatefulness — would have had no trouble in assuming the dogged resolution with which Macbeth

began henceforth to outface Fate. Not so this soul, who has known "how tender 'tis to love the babe" that milks her.

> "The tackle of her heart is crack'd and burned;
> And all the shrouds wherewith her life should sail
> Are turned to one thread, one little hair."

She will soon be "a clod and module of confounded royalty."

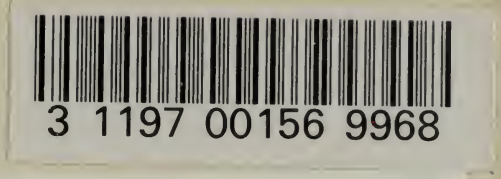
For she has been the cause of all; she has thus changed and compromised the man whom she hoped to help to majesty and safety; she, the determined guider of the first blow, must see that wound become a widening crack in the walls of love and honor, to bury what she hoped to shelter; and she has grown powerless to shore them up, or to let them fall upon herself and not upon him. The breaking heart pulls down her wits into its ruin.

Her undaunted mettle was but the over-bracing tonic of a moment, which punishes the structure it exalted.

> "A little water clears us of this deed:
> How easy is it, then!"

So she and Heaven differed; and the husband found it was not easy. A piteous self-arraignment of love is quite as potent to destroy her as a conscience that can sleep no more.

Night after night, her gentlewomen attend the repetition of scenes which she enacts, like a shadowy pageant in Hades of bygone life. Sleep's hammer tolls the castle-bell: "One, two! why, then 'tis time to do't." How Duncan bleeds! Who would have thought it of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